

2024



Community Wildfire Protection Plan

VISTA FIRE SAFE COUNCIL



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Preface

What is a community wildfire protection plan?

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) are *blueprints* for preparedness at the neighborhood level. They organize a community's efforts to protect itself against wildfire, and empower citizens to move in a cohesive, common direction.

Among the key goals of the Vista CWPP, which was developed collaboratively by citizens, and federal, state and local management agencies, are to:

- Align with the San Diego region's cohesive pre-fire strategy, which includes educating homeowners and building understanding of wildland fire, ensuring defensible space clearing and structure hardening, safeguarding communities through fuels treatment, and protecting evacuation corridors.
- Identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatment.
- Recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect the community.
- Recommend measures to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.



Note: The CWPP is not to be construed as indicative of project “activity” as defined under the “Community Guide to the California Environmental Quality Act, Chapter Three, Projects Subject to CEQA.” Any actual project activities undertaken that meet this definition of project activity and are undertaken by the CWPP participants or agencies listed shall meet with local, state, and federal environmental compliance requirements.

The Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County produced this report in partnership with the San Diego County Fire Safe Council which is comprised of a 15-member Board of Directors consisting of leading representatives from federal, state & local agencies and stakeholders throughout San Diego County. Funding is provided by the California Fire Safe Council through the 2022 CAL FIRE County Coordinator Program. In accordance with the federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

01

Snapshot of the Community

Each community in San Diego County has a unique history and identity. Below is a description of what sets this area apart, including its landscape, preparedness, and firefighting resources.

I. OVERVIEW

Vista, CA

The area of the Vista Fire Safe Council corresponds to that of the Vista Fire Protection District, in north San Diego County. The area is roughly 43 miles north of San Diego, California. The area comprises approximately 20 square miles adjacent to the City of Vista primarily on the east. It is bordered on the north by the North County Fire Protection District, on the east by the Deer Springs and San Marcos Fire Protection Districts, on the south and west by the City of Carlsbad, and on the northwest by the City of Oceanside.

- The District serves a population of close to 20,000 people. It is characterized by rural and semi-rural residential lots with large to moderate-sized single-family homes, and extensive areas of undeveloped chaparral. Community members enjoy country living in a peaceful and quiet environment with dark night skies. There are no sidewalks and few streetlights.
- There are no public parks in the District and few commercial businesses. There is one school (Hannalei Elementary). The primary land use is rural residential. CalA-Vie, a world-class spa, and Vista Valley Country Club with its golf course, are in Gopher Canyon.



II. LANDSCAPE

Topography

Topographic features include Gopher Canyon in the northern part of the District, with its seasonal creek that drains into the San Luis Rey River, and Buena Creek in the southern portion, which flows into Agua Hedionda Creek and Lagoon. These are major east-west valleys that each contain County highways identified as evacuation routes. The San Marcos Mountains run generally north to south at the eastern edge of the District and are largely undeveloped.

- Most of the District is within the Inland Foothills Zone of San Diego County, with elevations from 119 feet to 1,671 feet above sea level. Much of the terrain is hilly, providing scenic views that gave the

area its name, Rancho Buena Vista, but also has implications for fire activity. Among the significant native shrub species are manzanita, scrub oak, lemonade berry, mountain mahogany, toyon, ceanothus, and chamise. There are many ornamental plantings at residences, as well as family fruit orchards of citrus and avocado trees. The District also contains riparian hardwood ecosystems with coast live oak and varying understory species. Non-native species such as Eucalyptus, Mexican Fan Palm, Pampas Grass, and Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*) have naturalized in riparian areas and vacant lots, where they present a significant fire hazard.

Fire History

The most impactful North County fires include:

- The Dawson fire (summer of 1983) from the southern area of the City of Vista extending into Carlsbad, consumed approximately 200 acres.
- The Gopher Canyon fire (July 1985) driven by powerful easterly winds, burned over 1000 acres.
- The Robbie Lane fire (late 1980s) in Gopher Canyon injured one Deer Springs firefighter.
- The Harmony Grove fire (October 1996) south of the District consumed 8600 acres and led to the loss of 60 homes and one life.
- The Gavlin fire (February 2002), primarily in Fallbrook to the north of the District, burned 5,763 acres and destroyed 43 houses. (This fire is unusual as it occurred in February.)
- The Cedar fire (October 2003), one of the largest wildfires in California history, burned 273,246 acres, destroyed 2820 buildings, and killed 15, including one firefighter. (Its advance was stopped prior to it reaching the District.)
- The Witch Creek and Rice fires (October 2007) affected Escondido and Fallbrook. (Several fires merged burning over 257,000 acres and causing 2 deaths and 55 injuries to firefighters.)

- The Cocos fire in San Marcos (May 2014), caused by arson, burned 1,995 acres and damaged 40 buildings.
- The Lilac fire (December 2017) moved east along Highway 76 and burned 4,100 acres and 114 houses. The fire directly impacted the District through road closures and a major commitment of Vista Fire resources through the incident.
- The Creek fire aboard Camp Pendleton (December 2020) burned 4,200 acres west of Fallbrook.

Key Infrastructure

- Natural riparian areas include seasonal creeks that generally run east to west. The Vista Irrigation District (VID) maintains the 20-million-gallon Pechstein Reservoir that connects to the San Diego Aqueduct and the Vista Flume. This facility is essential to a reliable water supply for the City of Vista and the surrounding area. While VID is the primary source of water, some areas of the Vista Fire Safe Council community are served by Rainbow, Vallecitos, and Oceanside Water Districts.
- As noted above, the primary land use in the area is rural residential, with many houses located in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Many of these homes are older and insufficiently hardened against a possible wildfire. There are extensive areas of native chaparral that provide protection against erosion and serve as habitat for a variety of species. The chapparal also provides a significant source of fuel for potentially destructive wildfires.
- Overhead power lines are the primary conduit for electrical service in the area, but these lines are vulnerable to treefall and high winds. Another vulnerability exists because the major roads in the area are two-lanes only and were engineered and built when the population was much smaller. Despite the rural nature of the area, there are heavy rush hour traffic delays during the morning and evening commuting

hours. Traffic on these roads has a major impact on fire department response times.

- There are a few areas of level open space, such as at Hannalei School and Vista Valley Country Club's golf course, that could be developed as Temporary Refuge Areas (TRAs).

Maps

Using technology and local expertise, the sponsors of this CWPP have included a series of maps depicting the site and situation of Vista (Appendix C). The following maps are visual aids from which the Vista Fire Safe Council, Fire Protection District, and community members can assess and make recommendations.

1. Area Communities Map
2. Fire Hazard Severity map
3. Fire History (2000-present)
4. Evacuation Map

III. FIREFIGHTING RESOURCES

The Vista Fire Protection District has a long-term contract with the City of Vista to provide fire and emergency services within the District until the year 2056. Additionally, wildland firefighting in the area is the responsibility of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) The Vista Fire Department is a modern, professional, suburban department that supports six stations. These stations provide primary coverage to the District. When needed, Vista Fire receives mutual aid from neighboring agencies which include Deer Springs Fire Protection District, North County Fire Protection District, San Marcos Fire Department, Oceanside Fire Department, and Carlsbad Fire Department.

02

Collaboration

Strong working relationships are critical in ensuring that our communities are well-prepared. This section describes those key partners and their roles in developing this CWPP.

I. KEY PARTNERS

The Vista Fire Safe Council led the development of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), with guidance and support from several partners. The development team included representatives from the agencies described in the table below.

ORGANIZATION	ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES
Fire Safe Council of Vista	Is currently in its organizational phase.
Vista Fire Protection District	Provided initial sponsorship of the Fire Safe Council of Vista.
Vista Fire Department	Has day-to-day responsibility for fire and medical response; conducts community risk and value assessments; develops community protection priorities; and established fuels treatment project areas and methods.
CAL FIRE / San Diego County Fire	Conducts community risk and value assessments; develops community protection priorities; and establishes fuels treatment project areas and methods. Additionally, CAL FIRE has statutory responsibility for wildland fire protection in State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands.
Fire Safe Council of SD County	Provided major assistance in drafting this document.
North County Fire Protection District	Neighboring agency with whom we work to make sure our plans are appropriately deconflicted.
Bureau of Land Management	Supports review and approval of document; offers education programs on evacuation preparedness and fire behavior; consultation with fuels projects and programs.

03

Community Engagement & Education

Understanding wildfire risk is a key building block in preventing the loss of property and life. This section discusses efforts to build awareness, starting with the individual.

I. PRIORITIES

1. Completing all requirements to become an accredited FSC.
2. Establishing the organization as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.
3. Attending all County FSC meetings.
4. Engaging in networking activities such as participating in other related fire and emergency response meetings, having informal chats with colleagues, or establishing regular check-ins with the San Diego Sheriff's Office (SDSO), Vista Fire, Vista Fire Prevention, and Vista Emergency Management.
5. Purchasing a "pop-up" tent with logos and appropriate branding which can be deployed at community events to build awareness and citizen investment

rescue, amateur radio operators, service clubs, and the Vista Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).

4. Provide a presence at community outreach events, e.g., Vista's Strawberry Festival or the annual National Night Out event sponsored by SDSO.
5. Enlist high school students to canvass high-risk neighborhoods to distribute educational materials about fire prevention, property mitigation, etc.
6. Distribute handouts on wildfire preparedness in cooperation with VFD Fire Inspectors.
7. Research and implement available programs such as the smoke detector project sponsored by the Red Cross.

II. COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS

As this is a newly forming Fire Safe Council, there is nothing yet to mark as completed.

III. FUTURE PROJECTS

1. Organize a Wildfire Safety Fair in collaboration with other agencies.
2. Provide neighborhood workshops on defensible space and home preparedness.
3. Establish liaison relationships with local preparedness and response groups such as animal

04

Structural Hardening

Long before a wildfire sparks, there are numerous steps that residents can take to protect their homes and other structures. This section describes some of those efforts.

I. PRIORITIES

1. Support the District and Vista Fire Department in education, engineering, and enforcement efforts.
2. Collaborate with the District and the County to enforce standards for construction; identifying hazards, e.g., in relation to shake roofs and combustible siding.
3. Support Firewise and/or other similar industry standards.
4. Support Zone Zero education for residents.

II. COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS

As this is a newly forming Fire Safe Council, there is nothing yet to mark as completed.

III. FUTURE PROJECTS

Potential future projects will be evaluated per the Community Hazard Ratings in the attached technical report (Appendix C).

05

Defensible Space

Creating a buffer between buildings and the grass, trees, shrubs, and other wildland areas surrounding it are essential to improving survivability. This section looks at efforts to build this key layer of protection.

I. PRIORITIES

1. Working with the District's Fire Protection Officer (Inspector) in support of defensible space inspections (DSI).
2. Canvassing communities in advance of DSI and providing educational materials designed to improve compliance.
3. Educating property owners about the next steps they can take to mitigate risk and become more fire resistant.

II. COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS

As this is a newly forming FSC, there is nothing to mark as completed at this time.

III. FUTURE PROJECTS

1. Partner with CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire Protection District in their chipping program.
2. Sponsor and promote classes in our area from the Fire Safe Council of San Diego (FSCSDC), CAL FIRE, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) such as the Wildland Urban Interface Workshop and Last Chance Survival Simulation Workshop.

06

Fuels Treatment

Fuels are combustible materials such as grasses, leaves, plants, shrubs and trees that feed flames. This section describes efforts to treat and manage these materials in the community.

I. COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS

As this is a newly developing FSC, there is nothing to report as completed at this time.

II. PRIORITIES

1. Investigate and analyze the need for fuel projects and fuel breaks with Vista Fire Department, CAL FIRE, and Vista Fire Protection District.
2. Collaborate with Vista Fire Chief and Fire Inspector to identify and remove hazard trees per Fire Code. Will seek grants for this work.
3. Explore grant opportunities in alliance with resource agencies such as CAL FIRE, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation, and others as RFPs (requests for proposals) are released. This grant search initiative will focus on projects to achieve fuel reduction, removal of non-native species including Eucalyptus, Mexican Fan Palms, and Arundo. Additionally, we will be vigilant for grants and funding opportunities to address trash removal and the restoration of Buena Creek through environmentally sensitive means. The US Department of the Interior offers funding through several offices and programs including the Office of Wildfire, the Wildfire Fire Management Program, and the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund. Furthermore, future grant searches will

include FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grants (HMG) programs and its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program.

4. Public education initiatives will be pursued through agencies such as the San Diego Fire Resource Foundation or the U.S. Fire Service.

III. FUTURE PROJECTS

1. Explore all methodologies for fuels treatments, including such things as goats and other novel approaches to wildfire mitigation.
2. Work with SDG&E to identify and remove hazard trees that are currently or potentially threatening power lines.
3. Remove invasive and flammable species from waterways in collaboration with the appropriate resource agencies.
4. Explore grants to achieve the above objectives.

07

Evacuation Planning

Identifying key corridors in and out of a community – as well as temporary refuge areas – is essential to being prepared for evacuation. This section provides an overview of the PACE system (primary, alternate, contingency and emergency) used to plan ahead.

Evacuation planning is a dynamic process subject to the nuances of each community. Below is an overview of the Vista Fire Safe Council's key ingress and egress, as well as designated evacuation corridors, Temporary Refuge Areas, completed projects, priorities and future projects.

I. OVERVIEW OF INGRESS AND EGRESS

Primary, Alternate, Contingency and Emergency (PACE) evacuation routes include Buena Creek Road and Gopher Canyon Road. These are both County highways that run east and west. The smaller roads that feed into these, such as Little Gopher Canyon Road, are often surrounded by years of brush accumulation. Due to terrain and geographic considerations, some areas within the District have only one paved road in and out. The Vista Fire Protection District has built and currently maintains multiple emergency access roads that are gated and locked until a specific need arises.

II. DESIGNATED EVACUATION CORRIDORS

Enter name of location

PRIMARY

1. Gopher Canyon Road
2. E. Vista Way
3. Melrose Drive
4. N. Santa Fe Avenue
5. Buena Creek Road
6. Civic Center Drive
7. Highway 78

8. Highway 76

ALTERNATE

1. Bobier Drive/Oceanside Boulevard
2. Olive Avenue
3. Sunset Drive

CONTINGENCY

1. W. Vista Way
2. Osborn Street
3. Taylor Street
4. Vale Terrace
5. Buena Vista Drive
6. Mar Vista Drive
7. Shadowridge Drive

EMERGENCY None.

Note: Due to the numerous pathways from one's home to one of the routes listed, there are no granular-level emergency routes designated in this document. Residents are and will continue to be encouraged to know their individual exit strategies and designated places for seeking refuge. Part of the future messaging will remind residents to plan for reunification with family members.

III. TEMPORARY REFUGE AREAS

As noted above, the primary evacuation routes from our area are Buena Creek Road and Gopher

Canyon Road. The District intends to explore possible sites for TRAs and develop them in concert with law enforcement (the San Diego Sheriff's Department) and Vista Fire Department. We will request that the Vista Fire Chief deconflict evacuation routes from adjacent communities. At present, the Vista Valley County Club at 29345 Vista Valley Drive off Gopher Canyon Drive is the only TRA within the District.

The other designated TRAs in the city of Vista include:

1. Vista Sports Park (1600 Sports Park Way)
2. Stater Brothers location (intersection of Bobier Drive and N. Santa Fe)
3. North County Regional Center (Court, Sheriff, Probation, etc. at 325 S. Melrose)
4. Wave Waterpark (101 Wave Drive)
5. Buena Vista Park (2101 Lupine Hills Drive)
6. Rancho Buena Vista High School (1601 Longhorn Drive)

IV. PRIORITIES

- Fuels reduction along evacuation routes as this is deemed to be essential for protecting lives and property in the area.

V. COMPLETED & ONGOING PROJECTS

As this is a newly developing FSC, there is nothing yet to mark as completed.

VI. FUTURE PROJECTS

1. The Vista FSC will continue to participate in the San Diego County roadside PACE program mentioned above. (Planning partners in this program include the Vista Fire Department, CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire, and Fallbrook's Fire Safe Council.)
2. Collaborate with PACE participants to ensure that all evacuation plans are de-conflicted.
3. Monitor and pursue grant opportunities for fuels reduction along evacuation routes.
4. Engage with the San Diego Sheriff's office to review that agency's evacuation policies, protocols, and procedures and to plan for, at the very least, a

tabletop exercise to discuss a real-life scenario to test the effectiveness and efficiencies of the plan.

5. Actively collaborate with other agencies such as San Diego Gas and Electric (SDGE), County-level emergency response programs, FEMA mitigation teams, etc.

08

Other Mitigation & Preparedness

There are countless ways that communities can act to protect themselves ahead of wildfires. This section details additional past, current and future efforts underway that were not previously mentioned.

I. PRIORITIES

1. There are multiple vacant and unmaintained properties in the area, many of which contain volunteer, non-native fuel trees (such as the Eucalyptus and Mexican fan palms). The FSC, in conjunction with the Vista Fire Department and CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire, shall explore the various options for mitigating these tree hazards in a manner that is like what is already being done for weed abatement.

2. Additionally, our riparian areas require an actionable management plan that is consistent with, and acceptable to the area's resource agencies.

II. COMPLETED AND/OR ONGOING PROJECTS

As this is a newly developing FSC, there is nothing to mark as completed at this time.

III. FUTURE PROJECTS

Many properties in this rural area lack clear reflective number signs identifying their address. As this plan becomes operationalized, the FSC intends to provide 4" reflective numbers to these people.


09

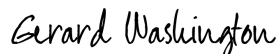
Signatures

This plan must be approved by the following key parties: the local author (examples include Fire Safe Council President, Firewise Community, Tribal National, HOA, etc.), the chief of the primary responding fire agency, the CAL FIRE Unit Chief, and chair of the CWPP review committee. This section includes these signoffs.

*The Community Wildfire Protection Plan, as developed for as developed for **Vista Fire Safe Council**:*

- Was collaboratively developed and meets the intent of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) in emphasizing the need for agencies to work collaboratively with communities in developing hazardous fuel reduction projects, and places priority on treatment areas identified by communities themselves in a CWPP. Interested parties and federal land management agencies in the vicinity of this CWPP have been consulted.
- Identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment that will protect areas within this CWPP.
- Recommends measures to reduce ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.
- Is intended for use as a planning and assessment tool only, utilizing a compilation of community issues/goals and projected fire mitigation strategies. The CWPP is not to be construed as indicative of project “activity” as defined under the “Community Guide to the California Environmental Quality Act, Chapter Three, Projects Subject to CEQA.” Per the Community Guide, Section 3.1.1, “CEQA only applies to public agency decisions to approve, or actions to carry out, a discretionary project.” Any actual project activities meeting this definition of project activity and undertaken by the CWPP participants or agencies listed shall meet with local, state, and federal environmental compliance requirements.
- Assists and encourages compliance with current county and state fire code standards.

DocuSigned by:

 X _____
 President of the
 Fire Safe Council Submitting this CWPP

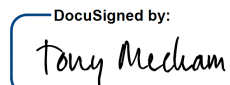
DocuSigned by:

 X _____
 Participating Fire Agency representative
 (State, Local, or Tribal)

San Diego County Community Wildfire Prevention Plans Review Committee:

This CWPP was reviewed and recommended for approval by the San Diego Community Wildfire Protection Plan Review Committee as demonstrated by the signature below.

X 
03EBDCB2A3B6403...
Don Butz, President
Fire Safe Council of San Diego County

The CAL FIRE Unit Chief has final signing authority on CWPPs in San Diego County. The signature below attests that the standards listed in the section above and the content of this Community Wildfire Protection Plan are proposed to be met and mutually accepted.

X 
03A04432E233429...
Tony Mecham, Unit Chief
CAL FIRE San Diego Unit

10

Appendices

This section includes important additional information that complements other portions of the plan.

APPENDIX A.

MEETING TRACKING DOCUMENTS

This CWPP was developed for the community of Vista, through a series of community meetings. The Vista Fire Safe Council members who contributed to the document include the following:

Community Representatives

- Daniel Gomez
- John Ploetz

Agency Representatives

- Donald Butz, FSC of San Diego County
- Ryan Silva, CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire
- Morgan Dioli, RCD of Greater San Diego County

Meetings Dates

APPENDIX B.
MAPS

Figure 1 Area Communities Map

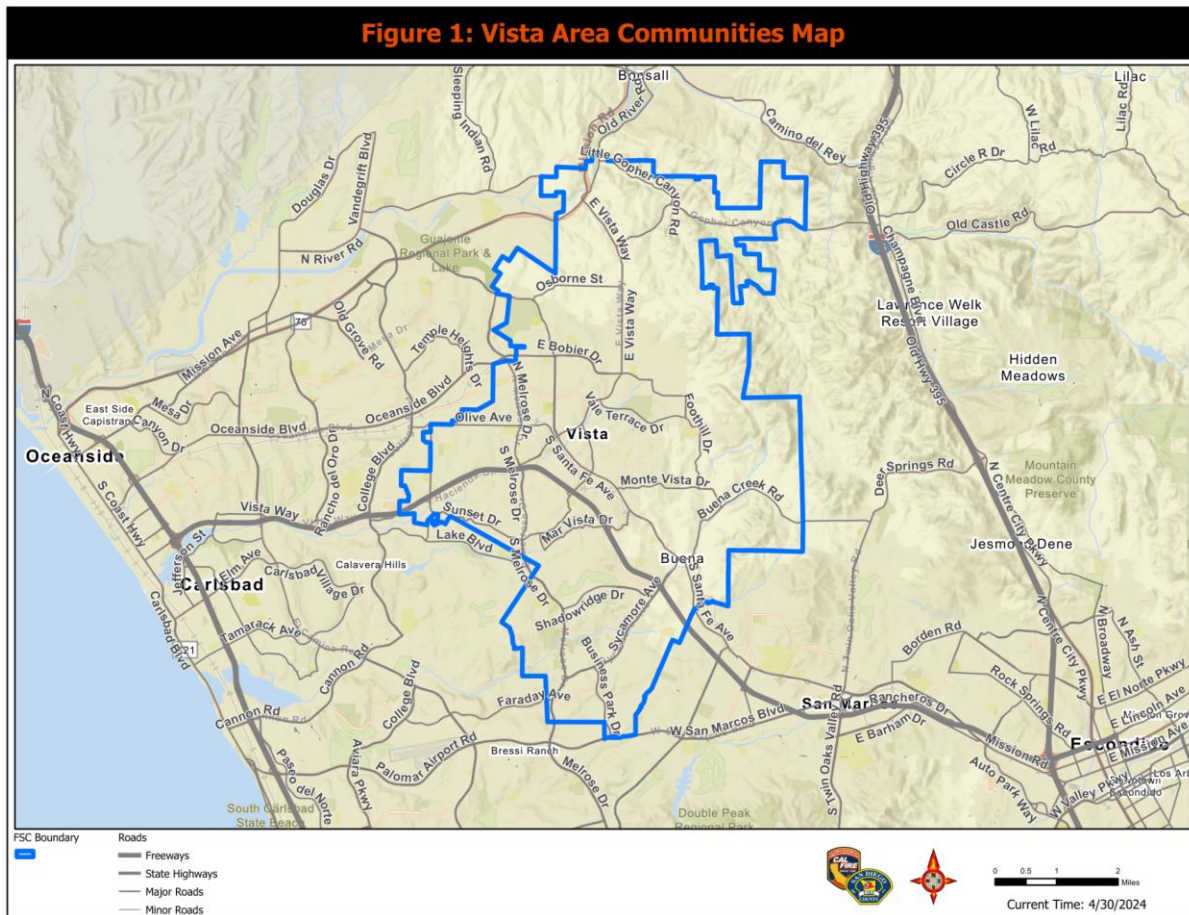


Figure 2 Fire Hazard Severity Map

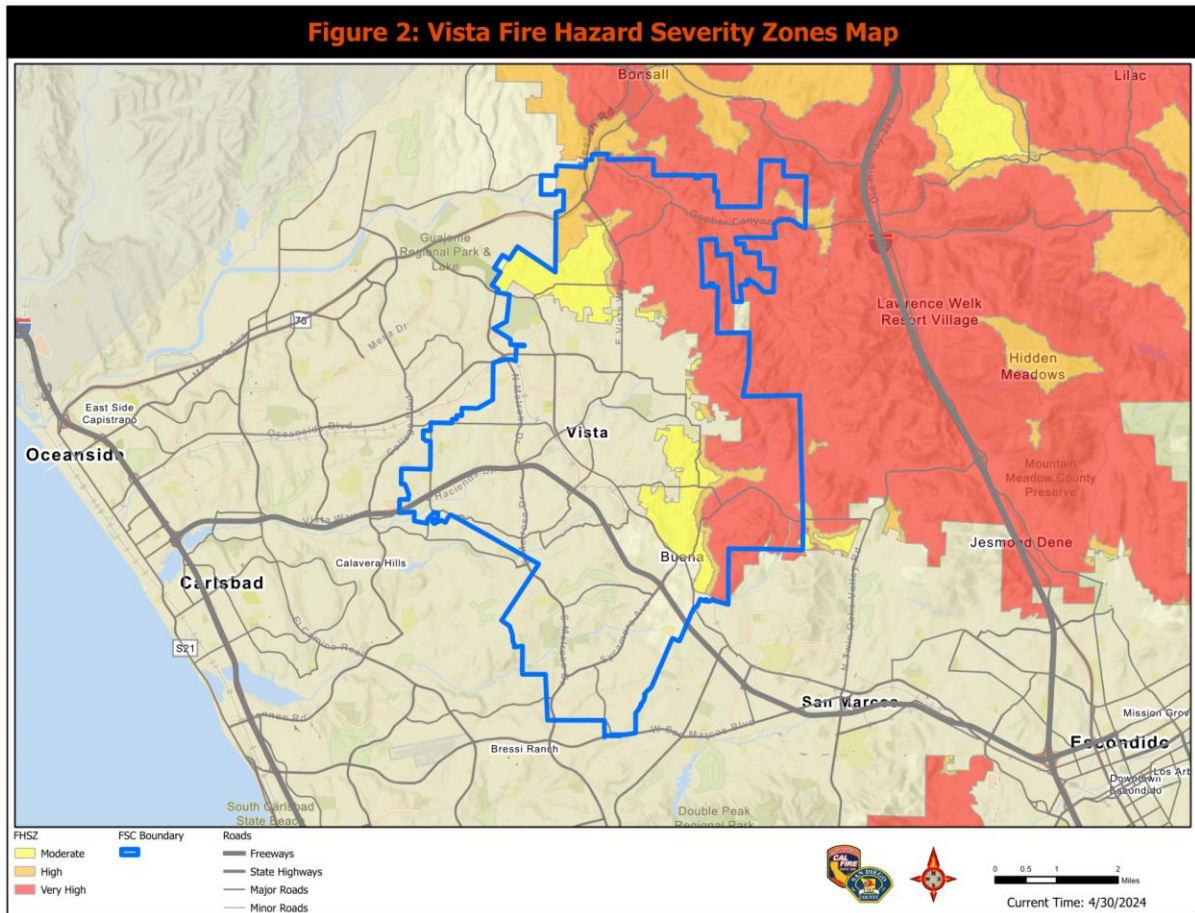


Figure 3 Fire History 2000-Present

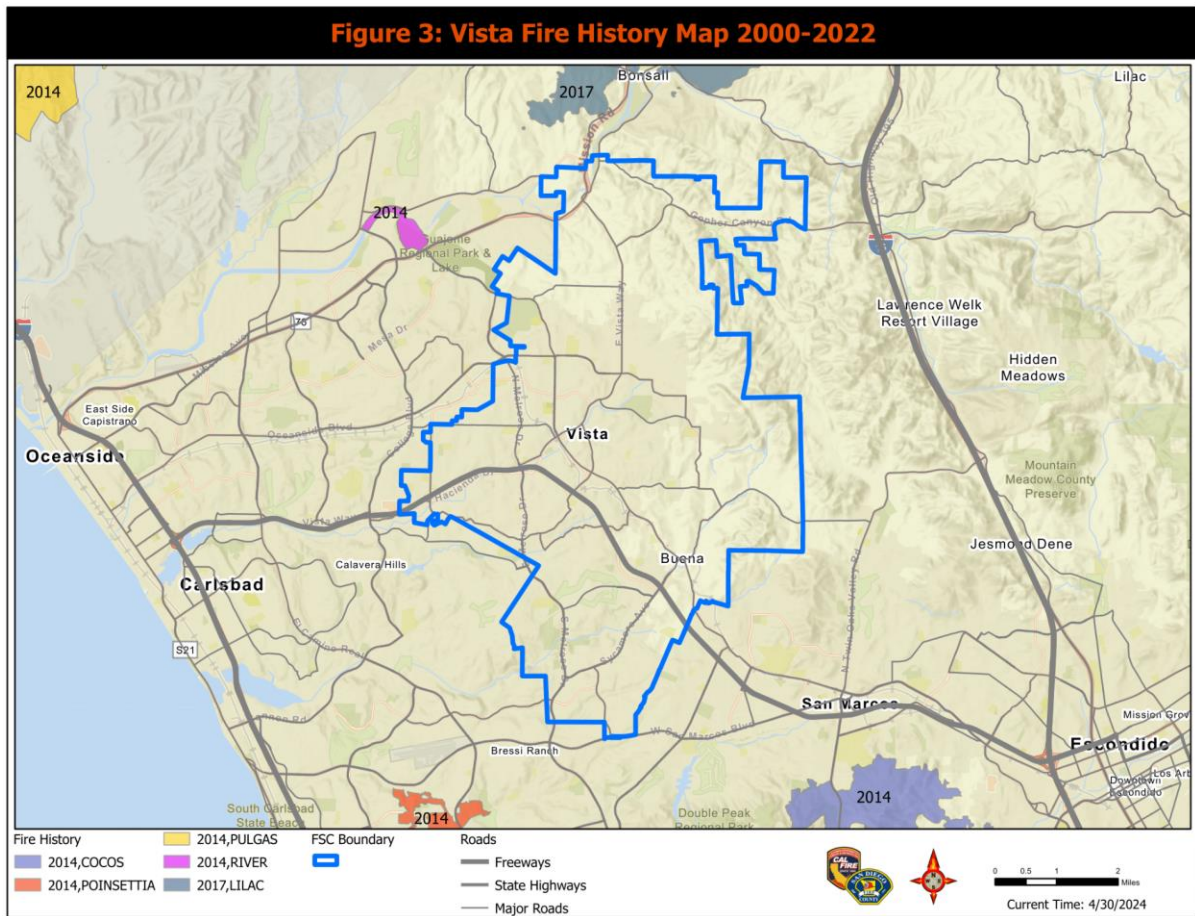


Figure 4 Evacuation Map

