El Dorado County
COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN
Sub-Section for
COOL & PILOT HILL FIRE SAFE COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Prepared for Inclusion in the:

EL DORADO COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL
Community Wildfire Protection Plan
Diamond Springs, California

Prepared for:
COOL-PILOT HILL FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

JANUARY 2017
History of Cool and Pilot Hill

Originally, Cool was known as the Cave Valley area, because of the limestone caverns in the area. These caves were a major tourist attraction. Eventually, the caves became a commercial source of limestone and were closed to the public. In 1956, the California Journal of Mines and Geology (Vol. 52, Number 4), reports “Cool-Cave was a major source of limestone for cement, lime, and beet-sugar industries for many years.”

The first pioneers were gold miners, but others stayed on and developed a stage stop for limestone delivered to and from the Divide. Farming became popular, because of the richness of the soil, and many orchards were developed in the area. When the post office was to be opened, the name Cave Valley was rejected as it was already in use. The town was thus named after Aaron Cool/Reverend Peter Y. Cool, who was a circuit riding preacher, well thought of by the area residents. Henrietta Lewis became the first postmaster in 1885. At the time, Cool not only had its post office, but also a general store, school, public houses, blacksmith and carriage stop, plus a meeting hall. Penobscot Ranch and Knickerbocker Ranch both had public houses and these historic properties still exist today.

Cave Valley was a crossroads for merchants, miners, families, and travelers because it was located on the Gold Country Road that later became Highway 49. It was also the intersection of the road that led to Georgetown and other smaller gold rush communities to the east. That road is now Highway 193.

Pilot Hills is located close to Cool on Highway 49. Pilot Hill takes its name from the promontory which rises above the surrounding ravines and hills, upon which “pilot” fires were lit to guide later travelers to the area. Before being called Pilot Hill, the mining camp established here in early 1849 was known as Centreville. Of special historical note in Pilot Hill, is the Bayley House and Barn, which is now a historical park in Pilot Hill on Highway 49. When completed in 1862, at a cost of $20,000, it was perhaps the grandest building in the state. Bayley believed the Central Pacific Railroad would pass close by his hotel, making it a logical stop on the route. The building’s grand opening took place on May 15 of 1862, but unfortunately, the dreams of Alcander Bayley were never realized as the railroad changed its route and bypassed the area completely.

Sphere of Recognition Description

The Cool-Pilot Hill community was established in the early 1850’s as a result of the gold rush and the advent of gold discovered nearby in Coloma (Marshall Gold Discovery Park which attracts school children and visitors annually). Pilot Hill is South of Cool on Highway 49. Cool and Pilot Hill are wildland urban interface communities located on the West Slope of El Dorado County, just South of Placer County.

Cool is the first business and residential community of El Dorado County from Auburn. Thus, Cool is the sole entrance into El Dorado County from Highway 80. This brings a great deal of traffic passing through Cool and Pilot Hill on Highway 49 over to Highway 50. The only Northern exit from El Dorado County is on Highway 49 through Cool. Highway 49 bisects the Cool-Pilot Hill area and runs South through El Dorado from County line at the Confluence of the North and Middle forks of the American River. The 100 Western States foot race as well as the world-class
international endurance trail ride passes through the Auburn State Recreation Area in Cool. The area is a watershed for the American River and Folsom Lake.

The community has been identified as a Community at Risk for wildfire in the Federal Register. The 2010 U.S. Census lists over 5,000 people living in Cool/Pilot Hill combined. These numbers will have increased in the subsequent 6 years. Forty percent are between the ages of 45-64 and the median age is 48. In 2010 there were over 3,000 housing units and nearly 30 percent are households include individuals 65 or older.

The Cool Pilot Hill Fire Safe Council was established in late 2015. There six board members and hold monthly meetings open to the public. Board members and volunteers include backgrounds in facilities and project management, grant administration, biology and fire suppression. In 2016 the Council presented three community forums open to the public focusing on READY – SET – GO. The first forum was held at the Northside School and included a motto and mascot designed by students from Northside during a Coo-Pilot Hill school competition. Since the inception of the Cool-Pilot Hill Fire Safe Council education has been the initial focus and now the Council is actively involved in grant writing to seek funds for further education and fire fuel reduction.

The topography within the community is rolling hills and steeper terrain. Cool and Pilot Hill are essentially rural residential, with Cool having a downtown main street at the intersection of Highways 49 and 193. There, one finds several restaurants, a new Holiday Market, Wells Fargo Bank, real estate offices, gas station/convenience store, feed store, gift store, dentist, optometrist, post offices, and other primarily family owned and run store fronts. The Cool main street shopping area has essentially doubled in size in the last several years. There are many residential and agricultural properties distributed throughout Cool and Pilot Hill. Northside School, a California Distinguished School, is located in Cool on Highway 49. There is an El Dorado County fire station at the entrance to Cool on Highway 49 – this is not always manned.

The Auburn State Recreation Park entrance is located in Cool behind the fire station. From there, visitors can hike, bike, ride horses, walk their dogs and participate in major national competitive bike and running races, at the same time enjoying the beautiful open landscape. Many large competitive runs and biking events are staged out of the Cool fire station and enjoy the Auburn State Recreation Park rolling hills for their national and international races. Today, families as well as retired folks alike, enjoy and appreciate all that Cool and Pilot Hill offer.

Figure 1 on the following page is a map of the Sphere of Recognition for the Cool/Pilot Hill Fire Safe Council
Figure 1: Cool/Pilot Hill Sphere of Recognition
Emergency Services

The El Dorado County Fire Protection District provides primarily the structure firefighting resources as well as wildfire protection for the community. There is fire equipment based at the Cool fire station #72. This is a volunteer station, which is only periodically staffed. The next nearest station is Garden Valley and then Georgetown. The closest ambulance is located in Georgetown. The closest CAL FIRE station is Pilot Hill.

Existing Condition/ Area Description

Ponderosa pine in the community is included in the tier one tree mortality high hazard zone. A large section of forest east of the community above the town of Georgetown is identified as tier two tree mortality high hazard zone. Cool contains isolated patches of Ponderosa pine at the lower elevation of its range and drought and disease has already killed many of these trees. Cool/Pilot Hill and surrounding communities are experiencing tree mortality from isolated groves to whole neighborhoods.

Areas of Greatest Threat

The areas of greatest threat are divided into two areas, Internal and External to the Cool-Pilot Hill Sphere of Recognition.

Internal threats are:

• The need for an ambulance and full time staffed community fire station in Cool. At times, the ambulance in Georgetown is not sufficient and an ambulance must be sent from further away. Thirty percent of the residences in Cool and Pilot Hill include individuals 65 and older.

• Evacuation routes and routes of travel are limited. If a major route, such as Highway 49 and/or 193 are blocked, then evacuation capacity is severely limited. In a sudden emergency, many automobiles will travel on the same major highways with many areas using the same routes, including Auburn Lake Trails, Georgetown, Garden Valley, and Greenwood, to name a few. Northside School and adjacent Cool Community Church could have a sudden major influx onto Highway 49 in an emergency.

• Failure of the residents to have adequate defensible space for their homes. (Violations of the California Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291)

• Failure of vacant landowners who do not remove hazardous vegetation. (Violation of the El Dorado County Nuisances Code Section 25845 Chapter 9.02)

• Cool and Pilot Hill have a larger than normal number of large animals, including horses and cattle. If a sudden need to evacuate occurred, this could present a serious problem.

Community Preparedness for a Wildfire Emergency

There has not been a great deal of emergency preparedness within the community members themselves. The establishment of the Cool-Pilot Hill Fire Safe Council in 2015 can begin to help. The Council has been proactive in educating the community of the hazards and is enthusiastic about continuing to prepare the community for a wildfire. There has not been an establishment of a CWPP for the area.
The major evacuation routes (Highway 49 and 193) are very important due to the location of the community and the difficulty of evacuation in the event of a wildfire in or near the Sphere of Recognition. The evacuation routes can be easily cut off due to the location of the only access to and from the area. It is important that these routes be cleared in order to protect them from wildfire.

The rather new Cool-Pilot Hill Fire Safe Council has held 3 public forms open to the community during 2016:

1. **April 25 (4:30-5pm(pizza!) 5-7pm(presentations): “Ready” Event at Northside School (Library); Cool, CA**

   This event featured:
   - A “Fireside Chat” about Fire Safety with Supervisor Michael Ranalli
   - A facilitated conversation with Mark Brunton (CalFIRE Station 72 Battalion Chief) and Jeff Tolson (Cool Fire Chief El Dorado County, Retired)
   - Announcing the winners of the Cool-Pilot Hill Fire Safe mascot and motto contest (submissions by students from Northside School, Cool, CA)
   - Presenters from the El Dorado County Public Health, Preparedness, and Response
   - And much more!

2. **June 22 (6-8pm): “Set” Event at Pilot Hill Grange; Cool, CA**

   This event featured:
   - Information about the Cool-Pilot Hill Fire Safe Council (meet the Council members!)
   - Supervisor Ranelli, Fireside Chat about Fire Safety
   - Mark Brunton, CalFIRE Battalion Chief
   - Lieutenant James Byers, Office of Emergency Services
   - Officer Ian Hoey, California Highway Patrol
   - Henry Brezenski, EDC Animal Services
   - Chief Schwab, Georgetown Fire Department

3. **September 21 (6-8pm): “Go” Event at Cool Hall; Cool, CA**

   This event included:
   - District IV Supervisor Michael Ranalli
   - Sergeant Todd Hammitt (Office of Emergency Services, El Dorado County)
   - Brandon McKay, Captain/Deputy Fire Marshal (EDC Fire District)

   Chief Schwab, Georgetown Fire Department

   The event provided critical information needed to know if one had a day or few hours to evacuate.

**Fuel Reduction Objectives and Projects**

- Projects could include:
• Provide the residents with an external evacuation route that would improve the current situation. During each community forum of the Fire Safe Council, individual residents noted neighbors had serious need for clearly their property to protect against fire. Some streets were reported to be blocked off in case of emergency.
• Treat fuels along collector roads in such a manner so they can be used as evacuation routes.
• Work with the El Dorado County Fire District and CAL FIRE to build a stronger Defensible Space Program resulting in fire safe clearance on individual lots and working with the County Board of Supervisors to enforce hazardous vegetation nuisance code.
## Summary of proposed treatment by cost for the Cool-Pilot Hill Area

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