Our Fire Safe Council’s 5th year is underway and we are pleased to have all board members continue save one as John Hidahl has been elected EDC District One Supervisor. Our sincere congratulations to John and we look forward to his continued support. However, now we have a board position open and are seeking interested volunteers. In addition, the 2017 Events Calendar is going together and we can use ideas and volunteers for activities. Email us or attend a meeting. Let us know your availability. Thank you!

LHFS is an all-volunteer and community-benefit organization and exists on donations. Hard-earned grants support fuel reduction efforts in both the public lands and on private property. The annual SRA fees we all pay only come back to the community by investing time and effort to write and apply for grant monies. Are you safer with the reduction of fuel & due to education provided by the Fire Safe Council? Each donation to the Fire Safe Council contributes to its sustainability as we have one major expense: liability insurance (about $2000/yr.). Please support your local nonprofit organization financially or with the gift of volunteering.

Save the Date! Firewise BBQ: May 7th

Annual Firewise Event will be held on Sunday, May 7th at Lake Forest Park.

It is going to be a big event, just like last year. There will be food, beverages, guest speakers, and raffle prizes. This year will be a combined event, teaming with all our member communities.

Plan to bring the family and neighbors for some fun and community comradery. This event has grown each year and re-energizes each of us to work as a community to be both Fire Wise and Fire Safe.

Shaded Fuel Break Work

Vegetation management work within the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area (FLSRA) to maintain on-going Shaded Fuel Break (SFB) efforts continued in 2017, beginning on January 25th and will continue for the next few days. Maintenance of the SFB is very important to keep a defensive zone in the event of a wildfire; the current work has already removed brush re-growth and several trees that had gone down in the recent storms.

The crews performing this work are from the California Conservation Corps (CCC) and you may see them traveling through the area or perhaps working near your property if you share a boundary with the State Park. As we have stated before, the CCC is an outstanding youth program, not inmate crews, so if you see them please wave and/or express your appreciation for their hard work. Read about the CCC at www.ccc.ca.gov.

Our sincere appreciation to the Bureau of Reclamation, the CCC and California State Parks for the continuing partnership as we work together to protect our communities and all surrounding lands from catastrophic wildfire.
A proposed 2-MW biomass power project in California’s Mariposa County is one step closer to reality.

The Mariposa Biomass Project, a non-profit community group in Mariposa, California, recently closed escrow on two parcels for its future location, the group announced. It will be located in the Mariposa Industrial Park, near the Mariposa County Solid Waste Facility and PG&E substation.

The project received a USDA U.S. Forest Service 2016 Wood Innovations grant of $244,000, and is in the running to score a $5 million California Energy Commission EPIC grant. Stephen Smallcombe, the group’s CTO said that the EPIC grant is critical to the project moving forward. A similar biomass power plant in North Fork, California, currently being constructed by Phoenix Energy, was a previous EPIC grant recipient.

Smallcombe has worked closely with the group’s CEO, engineer Jay Johnson, and other community members, to select a developer and find a suitable site for the project. The project hopes to take advantage of California’s SB 1122, or BioMAT (Biomass Market Adjusting Tariff), which supports small-scale forest biomass energy projects. At anticipated rates, the tariff could provide the project with up to $3.5 million dollars of annual revenue.

Qualifying for BioMAT has historically been a lengthy, complicated and expensive process to work through, requiring multiples bidders and a hefty interconnection down payment, according to Smallcombe. So far not one kWh of electricity has been produced under this program. However, a recent rule rewrite by the California Legislature, guided by the governor’s Tree Mortality Task Force has simplified the process and now allows projects to participate in the auction without the previously required interconnection fee down payment of 30 percent of the projected $2 million interconnect cost. It is not easy for these small-scale biomass projects to come up with $600,000 a year or more before any possible revenue stream, Smallcombe said.

Building on the state’s current push to remove and utilize millions of dead and dying trees susceptible to catching fire or falling on houses, the plant will use nearby forest waste as fuel via a multi-stage gasification technology supplied by Cortus Energy. “The Sierra has over 100 million dead trees right now, and in Mariposa County and many of our communities in the foothills, there’s about 98 percent mortality of pines, so we have biomass coming out of our ears right now,” Smallcombe said.

In late 2015, California Gov. Jerry Brown declared the situation a state of emergency and laid out the groundwork aimed at combatting the issue, with some emphasis on getting that material to bioenergy facilities. Some of the ag-based Central Valley plants that have or were going to go out of business as a result of expired PURPA contracts and inability to secure new ones at profitable rates have benefitted from some of Gov. Brown’s initiatives. “So far, I believe six is the latest count of power plants that have been saved or reestablished new contracts and are not shutting down,” Smallcombe said. “So that’s good news. They’re taking a lot of fuel from dead trees, but they’re full now, and there’s still a glut of fuel. Small-scale biomass plants located near the source of the fuel, like the one the project hopes to build, will help with the economic viability of disposing of the dead trees by minimizing transportation costs.

Though the Mariposa project developers are anxious to secure a power purchase agreement and come online, Smallcombe said several things have to be done yet, including the upcoming completion of a system impact study with PG&E, permitting with the county, and securing the EPIC grant needed to help finance the project.

Smallcombe said he expects to find out if the project will receive the grant in March or April.

CAL FIRE will be conducting a defensible space, State of California PRC 4291 training class on March 28th, 1:00 to 2:30 pm, at the US Forest Service Building in Placerville. Registration is required by March 15, 2017. If interested, email us at lakehillsfiresafecouncil@gmail.com and we will send you the registration form.
**NASA finds relationship between wildfire and drought** - NFPA Faith Berry

_NASA conducted a recent study about drought_ caused by changes in climate as well as human-caused activities in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa. According to the study, “A periodic temperature shift in the Atlantic Ocean, known as the Atlantic Multi-decadal Oscillation, plays a role, as does overgrazing, which reduces vegetative cover, and therefore the ability of the soil to retain moisture. By replacing vegetative cover’s moist soil, which contributes water vapor to the atmosphere to help generate rainfall, with bare, shiny desert soil that merely reflects sunlight directly back into space, the capacity for rainfall is diminished.”

The study found that biomass burning by herders who burn the grassland to stimulate new growth also stymies convection that can bring rainfall. The study indicated that having too many aerosols in the form of particles from the fire of burning grasslands can inhibit the formation of raindrops.

Scientists from NASA studied data from NASA's moderate resolution spectroradiometer and the Tropical Rainfall Measurement Mission to analyze how wildfires can affect water cycles. This study found a connection between increased wildfires and a lack of precipitation. Due to some study anomalies, different research modeling is currently being developed to examine more in depth the relationship between large-scale biomass burning and drought.

Image of NASA’s study region in Africa

**USAA Provides Policyholder Discounts in Seven States** - NFPA

The Departments of Insurance in seven states have approved filings by USAA to give homeowners insurance discounts to USAA members living in communities recognized by the Firewise Communities/USA® program. This discount applies to policies issuing or renewing on the following dates in the states listed below:

- California - Policies effective on or after 10/1/2014
- Colorado - Policies effective on or after 5/30/2015
- Texas - Policies effective on or after 6/30/2015
- Arizona - Policies effective on or after 2/15/2016
- Oregon – Policies effective on or after 6/30/2016
- New Mexico - Policies effective on or after 1/1/2017
- Utah - Policies effective on or after 1/5/2017

One of the benefits of being a Firewise Community is that USAA provides a discount to those community homeowners who have USAA insurance. We are proud to say that all 3 of our member communities are Firewise. What is the discount and how do you know if you are eligible? Read more at this link: [CLICK HERE](#)

**Chipping Program Suspension** - El Dorado County Fire Safe Council

Due to the anticipated exhaustion of current grant funding, the EDC Fire Safe Council’s free chipping program will be suspended in the very near future. Very little funding remains and chipping requests are being handled on a first come - first served basis. The EDCFSC is seeking additional funding and hopes to be able to restart the program in the near future. Watch the EDCFSC website for future announcements. [CLICK HERE](#)