

Aldercroft Community Wildfire Resilience, Ecological Stewardship & Neighborhood Pod Initiative

Project Narrative

The Aldercroft Community Wildfire Resilience, Ecological Stewardship & Neighborhood Pod Initiative is a pilot-scale community wildfire resilience and vegetation management project focused initially within the Aldercroft Heights community in the Santa Cruz Mountains portion of northern Santa Clara County. The project is intended to demonstrate a scalable, neighborhood-based stewardship model that can be replicated in additional high-risk wildland-urban interface (WUI) communities within the North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District (“District”) service area.

The project area is characterized by steep terrain, dense vegetation, narrow and constrained roadways, limited evacuation routes, aging infrastructure, and elevated wildfire exposure. Prior community assessments and local planning efforts, including the *2018 Report on Road Conditions in the Aldercroft Heights Subdivision*¹, identified roadside vegetation encroachment, ladder fuels, invasive vegetation, hazardous trees, and unmanaged eucalyptus stands as significant concerns affecting evacuation safety, emergency response access, and long-term community resilience. In several locations, mature eucalyptus trees overhang evacuation routes and utility infrastructure, creating elevated ignition potential, increased ember production, and potential roadway obstructions during wildfire or storm events. Due to their size, location, and complexity of removal within steep WUI terrain, eucalyptus treatments are often significantly more costly than standard roadside vegetation management activities.

The initiative combines strategic roadside vegetation management, ecological stewardship, and community-based resilience planning through a coordinated, phased approach designed to improve wildfire preparedness while building long-term local stewardship capacity.

The project also builds upon prior community wildfire mitigation efforts implemented in partnership with the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council and San Jose Water. Those efforts demonstrated both the substantial benefits of roadside vegetation treatment and the challenges associated with homeowner participation, particularly concerns regarding vegetation removal preferences, slope stability, and erosion control within steep roadside environments. The proposed project incorporates lessons learned from these earlier efforts by emphasizing community education, collaborative planning, and ecologically sensitive treatment approaches prior to implementation.

1. Evacuation Route and Roadside Vegetation Management

The project will implement targeted vegetation management treatments along priority evacuation and emergency access routes within the Aldercroft community. Treatments will focus on reducing hazardous roadside vegetation, ladder fuels, invasive vegetation, and select hazardous trees that may impede emergency response or evacuation during wildfire events. Particular emphasis will be placed on treatment of hazardous eucalyptus trees and associated fuel conditions located along constrained evacuation corridors and near critical infrastructure. In several locations, unmanaged eucalyptus stands contribute elevated ember production potential, roadside fuel continuity, hazardous tree failure risk, and potential roadway obstruction during wildfire or storm events. Due to the size, coppice structure,

¹ Dr. Richard Harris, with assistance from CAL FIRE SCU Division Chief Ed Orre.

steep terrain conditions, and proximity to roads and infrastructure, eucalyptus treatment and removal activities are often substantially more complex and costly than standard roadside vegetation management operations.

Work will prioritize strategic treatment locations that improve ingress and egress reliability, reduce roadside ignition potential, and support safer emergency access within the community's constrained mountain road network.

2. Neighborhood Pod Resilience and Stewardship Program

A central element of the project is the creation of neighborhood pods — small groups of neighboring residents working collaboratively on adaptive risk reduction, vegetation stewardship, preparedness, and ecological restoration activities.

The pod approach is intended to:

- Improve neighborhood-level coordination and communication;
- Encourage collaborative vegetation management across property boundaries;
- Support continuity of fuel reduction treatments;
- Build long-term local stewardship and volunteer capacity;
- Strengthen community preparedness and adaptive resilience.

The project recognizes that wildfire resilience in fragmented WUI environments is most effective when approached collaboratively at the neighborhood scale rather than through isolated parcel-level efforts.

3. Ecological Restoration and Stewardship

Where feasible, vegetation management activities will be integrated with ecological restoration objectives to support long-term landscape resilience. Activities may include invasive vegetation reduction, retention and promotion of fire-resilient native vegetation, erosion prevention best management practices, and stewardship approaches that improve overall ecosystem function while reducing wildfire risk.

Because many roadside treatment areas occur within steep terrain, the project will emphasize treatment approaches that balance wildfire resilience objectives with erosion prevention, slope stability, and long-term ecological function. Community outreach and stewardship education will include discussion of the relationship between vegetation management, invasive species reduction, native vegetation retention, and erosion control in steep WUI landscapes.

The project seeks to demonstrate how wildfire mitigation and ecological restoration can be pursued simultaneously to achieve multiple community and environmental benefits.

4. Community Capacity Building and Outreach

The project includes community outreach, stewardship education, volunteer engagement, and neighborhood coordination activities intended to strengthen local capacity for long-term wildfire resilience and landscape stewardship.

The project will emphasize early and transparent community engagement prior to implementation activities, including educational outreach regarding treatment objectives, vegetation management approaches, erosion prevention considerations, and treatment review opportunities for participating

landowners. This approach is intended to build community understanding, strengthen participation, and improve long-term stewardship outcomes.

Activities may include community meetings, stewardship workshops, preparedness education, volunteer workdays, and anticipated coordination with the Aldercroft Heights Firewise Committee, the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, San Jose Water, tribal communities associated with the Santa Clara Valley and Santa Cruz Mountains, partner agencies, and local organizations.

Through this pilot-scale effort, the District intends to establish and evaluate a replicable framework for collaborative wildfire resilience, ecological stewardship, and neighborhood-scale preparedness that can be adapted to additional high-risk mountain communities throughout northern Santa Clara County. Lessons learned from project implementation, community engagement, and pod-based stewardship activities will help inform future community-scale wildfire preparedness and landscape stewardship initiatives within the District.

Strategic Alignment

The project strongly aligns with desired outcomes identified in the Santa Cruz Mountains Regional Priority Plan (SCMRPP)², in terms of:

- fostering healthy and safe human communities;
- increasing resilience to extreme events and climate change, including reduced wildfire risk and faster post-fire recovery;
- building capacity for maintenance treatments;
- enhancing and protecting biodiversity and ecosystem functions; and
- offering opportunities for monitoring, adaptive learning, and effective information sharing.

The initiative also supports the District's strategic priorities related to:

- wildfire preparedness;
- climate adaptation
- watershed stewardship
- biodiversity; and
- collaborative conservation planning.

By combining evacuation corridor improvements, ecological restoration, and neighborhood-scale stewardship systems, the project advances an integrated approach to wildfire resilience that reflects the collaborative regional framework promoted throughout the SCMRPP.

Budget Summary

The budget reflects the higher cost associated with treatment and removal of hazardous eucalyptus trees within steep and constrained wildland-urban interface conditions, while maintaining the project's emphasis on evacuation route resilience, ecological stewardship, and neighborhood-scale collaboration.

² SCMRPP, Goals and Outcomes section (pp. 7-8)

Budget Category	Year 1	Year 2
Project Management & Administration	\$35,000	\$20,000
Community Outreach & Engagement	\$10,000	\$5,000
Neighborhood Pod Development & Stewardship	\$18,000	\$12,000
Technical Planning & Mapping	\$5,000	0.00
Environmental Review & Permitting	\$18,000	0.00
Roadside Vegetation Treatments	\$55,000	\$28,000
Hazardous Tree Removal (including eucalyptus treatment)	\$105,000	\$45,000
Ecological Restoration & Maintenance	\$12,000	\$8,000
Equipment, Supplies & Signage	\$4,000	0.00
Volunteer Stewardship Support	\$5,000	0.00
Monitoring & Reporting	\$5,000	\$4,000
Volunteer Stewardship & Coordination Support	\$4,000	\$2,000
Annual Budget	\$276,000	\$124,000
Total Budget		\$400,000

Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network RPP Submission Form

Submitted Time: May 21, 2026 12:32 AM
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Contact Information

Project Contact?

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Project Lead Organization or Agency

North Santa Clara Resource
Conservation District

Project Name

Aldercroft Community Wildfire Resilience, Ecological Stewardship & Neighborhood Pod Initiative

Please select the primary project objective.

Wildland Urban Interface fuel reduction

If a primary objective is not listed, please enter it below:

Please select any secondary objectives that apply to this project.

Ecological restoration, Capacity building, Hazardous tree removal

Provide a brief description of your project, including where it is located and the work that will be conducted.

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The initiative combines strategic roadside vegetation management, ecological stewardship, and community-based resilience planning through a coordinated, phased approach designed to improve wildfire preparedness while building long-term local stewardship capacity. A central element of the project is the creation of neighborhood pods — small groups of neighboring residents working collaboratively on adaptive risk reduction, vegetation stewardship, preparedness, and ecological restoration activities.

Project Location



Project Status (Select One)

Planning phase

Continue with Survey?

Yes; I have a robust understanding of my project details and am prepared to continue.

Project Characteristics (Informational)

1. Include a description of the project area's management history. In particular, what is the state of its forested lands?

Forested lands in and around the community consist primarily of mixed evergreen forest, including coast redwood, Douglas-fir, bay laurel, madrone, oak species, and scattered eucalyptus stands, interspersed with residential development and roadside vegetation corridors. Historically, vegetation management within the

community has been fragmented and largely dependent on individual landowner maintenance, limited roadside clearing, utility-related vegetation work, and reactive hazard mitigation efforts. The current condition of forested lands within the project area reflects the combined effects of historic fire suppression, limited coordinated management, invasive vegetation pressures, and expanding WUI development. As a result, portions of the landscape now exhibit elevated fuel loading, increased ladder fuels, reduced vegetation heterogeneity, and constrained evacuation corridors that increase wildfire risk to residents, infrastructure, and surrounding natural resources.

2. Has there been a major disturbance (e.g., fire, flood, logging, etc.) in this project area within the past 10 years?

Yes

2b. What is the history of disturbance (e.g., fire, flood, logging, etc.) within the last 100 years in the project area and when did these things occur?

Although the Aldercroft Heights community itself did not experience a major wildfire directly within the neighborhood during the last ten years, the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire significantly affected the broader Santa Cruz Mountains region and heightened community concern regarding evacuation constraints, wildfire preparedness, and vegetation conditions within nearby WUI communities.

The project area was also affected by major winter storm and atmospheric river events in 2023 that caused flooding, slope failures, roadway impacts, tree failures, erosion, and infrastructure disruptions throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains region.

2c. Year of last disturbance?

2023

3. Is this a new treatment or a retreatment/maintenance?

New treatment, Retreatment/maintenance

3b. Please indicate the year the site was last treated or maintained.

2024

4. Does this project benefit an under-resourced community?

Yes

4b. If "Yes", how or why has this community been under-resourced?

Although the Aldercroft Heights community is not classified as a disadvantaged community under traditional statewide economic screening tools, it faces several forms of structural and wildfire-related under-resourcing common to rural mountain communities within the Santa Cruz Mountains wildland-urban interface (WUI). It is characterized by steep terrain, narrow and constrained roadways, limited evacuation routes, aging infrastructure, fragmented private ownership patterns, and dense vegetation conditions that significantly increase the complexity and cost of wildfire mitigation and emergency preparedness activities. Many vegetation management and hazardous tree removal projects — particularly treatment of large eucalyptus stands within steep roadside environments — are prohibitively expensive for individual property owners to address independently. Historically, wildfire mitigation and vegetation management within the community have relied heavily on volunteer efforts, limited grant-funded projects, and individual landowner participation rather than sustained public investment or coordinated long-term stewardship programs.

The community also faces increasing wildfire vulnerability associated with climate-driven drought stress, storm-related tree failures, flooding and erosion impacts from recent atmospheric river events, expanding fuel continuity, and growing insurance and emergency preparedness challenges affecting many mountain communities throughout the region. Due to these combined factors, the community has limited capacity to independently implement and sustain the level of coordinated vegetation management, ecological stewardship, evacuation corridor maintenance, and neighborhood-scale preparedness needed to address long-term wildfire resilience objectives.

5. Is this project supporting work within the footprint of a federally or state-declared disaster(s)?

No

5b. If so, what happened and when?

6. Has this project been identified as a priority in other organizational, local or regional plans?

Yes

6b. If "Yes", which ones?

The 2025 CAL FIRE Santa Clara Unit Fire Plan identifies the Lexington Basin area, including Aldercroft Heights, as a priority wildfire mitigation area for fuel

modification, evacuation route maintenance, and community wildfire preparedness activities.

The project area falls within the Lexington Basin / Lexington Hills wildfire planning area identified in the Santa Clara County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) framework and associated regional wildfire planning efforts. Earlier CWPP annexes identified Aldercroft Heights as an "Extreme" wildfire risk area due to steep terrain, constrained evacuation routes, adjacent fuels, and limited emergency access, while the updated CWPP framework continues to prioritize wildfire mitigation, evacuation readiness, and vegetation management within Santa Clara County WUI communities.

7. If you have a shapefile of the project area please upload it below. Project Location

Aldercroft Heights_WUI_General Project Area.png

8. What is the fire severity risk of the project area as defined by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP)

Very High

9. How many acres does the project area include? If there are several treatment polygons within a project area, their areas should be added to get the total acreage.

100

10. To your knowledge, is this project physically connected to another past or current project?

Yes

10b. If yes, how many other projects does it connect to?

1

10c. Please describe the strategic connectivity value of this project.

The project provides strategic connectivity value by supporting wildfire resilience and evacuation preparedness within the broader Lexington Basin / Santa Cruz Mountains wildland-urban interface planning area. The project builds upon prior community wildfire mitigation and roadside vegetation management efforts implemented in partnership with the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council and San

Jose Water, while helping strengthen continuity of vegetation management and stewardship activities within a recognized high-risk wildfire landscape.

The project also supports regional wildfire planning objectives identified in the Santa Clara County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) framework and the CAL FIRE Santa Clara Unit Fire Plan, including evacuation route maintenance, fuel reduction, community preparedness, and long-term vegetation management within mountain communities. By focusing on evacuation corridors, hazardous eucalyptus treatment, ecological stewardship, and neighborhood-scale coordination, the project helps improve resilience across fragmented ownership patterns and supports broader regional wildfire mitigation and community protection efforts throughout the Lexington Basin area.

Additionally, the neighborhood “pod” approach is intended to create a scalable community stewardship model that can inform future wildfire resilience and ecological restoration efforts in other similarly situated mountain communities within the District.

11. Does the project include work in any of the following areas: coastal zone, sensitive habitats as defined by CDFW, steep or rugged terrain, or riparian corridors?

Steep or rugged terrain, Riparian corridors

Primary Project Benefits

12. What is the primary benefit of the project?

Community Protection

13. Which of the following will this project protect?

Homes, Infrastructure, Human lives

13a. If you selected "Other" in the question above, please share some details about the community protection value of the project.

13. Check all the ecological benefits that apply.

Does this project restore or maintain native wildlife habitat?

Does this project support any species listed under the CESA, ESA, and/or CNPS Tier 1 ranking?

Does this project protect or restore sensitive habitats as defined by CDFW?

Does this project include an invasive species management component?

Does this project include a forest pathogen mitigation component, and/or is that the focus of the project?

13b. If you answered yes to any of the above, please describe how your project will provide those benefits.

12b. If you selected "Other" please state what the project's primary benefit is.

Do you have an estimate of the amount of benefit provided by the project?

The project is expected to provide community-scale wildfire resilience, ecological stewardship, and evacuation preparedness benefits within the Aldercroft Heights community and surrounding Lexington Basin area by supporting approximately 75–150 homes and associated residential structures through strategic roadside vegetation management, hazardous eucalyptus treatment, ecological restoration, and neighborhood-scale preparedness activities. Proposed work is anticipated to improve conditions along approximately 2–4 miles of priority evacuation and emergency access corridors, including portions of Aldercroft Heights Road, Laurel Drive, Locust Drive, and associated roadside areas, through reduction of hazardous roadside vegetation, ladder fuels, invasive vegetation, and hazardous tree obstruction risks. The project may influence approximately 10–25 acres of targeted treatment areas, including roadside corridors, adjacent steep slopes, and strategic eucalyptus treatment zones, while also providing ecological co-benefits across approximately 5–15 acres through invasive vegetation reduction, retention of fire-resilient native vegetation, erosion-aware stewardship practices, and reduction of high-severity wildfire risk potential. In addition to direct vegetation management outcomes, the project is intended to strengthen long-term community preparedness and stewardship capacity through neighborhood pod coordination, volunteer engagement, and collaborative wildfire resilience activities that support broader regional wildfire mitigation and community protection objectives within the Santa Cruz Mountains wildland-urban interface.

14. How many people depend upon evacuation routes impacted by this project?

10 ~ 500

15. Does this project include partners that help increase the pace, scale, or efficiency of this project, or that otherwise allow something beneficial to occur that could not happen without their involvement?

Yes

15b. If yes, please describe who they are and how they are providing these benefits.

We anticipate partnering with the Aldercroft Heights Firewise Committee, the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, San Jose Water, local tribal entities, and stakeholder organizations, but do not yet have specifics.

16. Have you calculated the GHG reduction for this project?

No

16b. If so what is the calculated GHG reduction?

17. Do you have a biomass management plan?

No

17b. If yes, what does the plan include?

18. Does this project offer workforce development benefits?

Unsure

18a. If so, what are the workforce development benefits?

Are you interested in being connected with workforce development resources?

Yes

19. Does this project protect or enhance the water quality or quantity available for human use by protecting/enhancing erosion control, infiltration/recharge, and/or water infrastructure?

Yes

19b. Provide a sentence or two about how this project protects water resources.

The project helps protect water resources by integrating wildfire resilience activities with erosion-aware vegetation management and ecological stewardship practices within steep Santa Cruz Mountains watershed environments. The Aldercroft Heights community is located within a highly sensitive upland watershed area where severe wildfire, slope instability, uncontrolled erosion, hazardous tree failures, and storm-related vegetation impacts can negatively affect water quality, drainage systems, and downstream aquatic resources. By

reducing hazardous fuel loading and strategically managing invasive vegetation and hazardous eucalyptus stands along roadside corridors and steep slopes, the project seeks to reduce the likelihood of high-severity wildfire impacts that can contribute to erosion, sedimentation, debris flows, and degraded watershed function following fire events. The project also emphasizes retention of appropriate native vegetation, erosion prevention best management practices, and ecologically sensitive treatment approaches designed to maintain slope stability and support long-term watershed health. In addition, improved evacuation and emergency access conditions may enhance the ability of emergency responders to more effectively manage wildfire incidents before they result in larger-scale watershed damage within the Lexington Basin and downstream Santa Clara Valley water resource systems.

20. Does this project protect or enhance marketable timber stands?

No

20b. Provide a sentence or two about how this project protects timber resources.

21. Does this project involve Indigenous communities or tribes in project design, implementation, or management/stewardship?

Yes

21b. If so, please describe the level and type of tribal engagement.

We have an ongoing relationship with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of San Francisco Bay and the Muwekma Ohlone Preservation Foundation. Anticipated level and type of tribal engagement will planning ecological restoration and collaborating on curriculum development for public education.

22. Does your ecosystem health/biodiversity project provide any community protection and safety benefits?

22. Does your community protection and safety project provide any ecological benefits?

The project provides ecological benefits associated with protection of wildlife habitat, sensitive species, and broader ecosystem function within the Santa Cruz Mountains region. The project area contains mixed evergreen forest and riparian-influenced habitats that support a variety of native wildlife species and ecologically important plant communities. By emphasizing ecologically sensitive vegetation management approaches, retention of appropriate native vegetation, erosion

prevention best management practices, and strategic rather than broad-scale vegetation removal, the project seeks to reduce wildfire risk while maintaining and improving long-term habitat quality and ecosystem resilience. Reduction of invasive vegetation and hazardous eucalyptus fuel conditions may also help improve native habitat conditions and reduce the potential for high-severity wildfire impacts that can result in extensive habitat loss, watershed degradation, and long-term ecological disturbance. In addition, reducing the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire within steep watershed environments may help protect habitat connectivity, soil stability, riparian function, and sensitive biological resources that occur throughout the Lexington Basin and surrounding Santa Cruz Mountains landscape. Project implementation would incorporate environmental review and consideration of sensitive species and habitat resources, as appropriate, during treatment planning and implementation activities.

Project Readiness

23. What is the estimated project timeline?

2 years

24. What is the estimated project cost?

400,000

25. Does the project require additional funding that has not been secured or identified?

Yes

25b. If "Yes" please describe briefly what funding is lacking and/or what sources of funding you have already identified.

This is a project idea which we have just developed with input from an individual who lives in the area and is a member of the Firewise Committee, so we have not yet started the search for funding or applied for grant opportunities. North Santa Clara RCD has the capacity to provide in-house support for grant application development and some administrative oversight.

26. Who is the CEQA lead agency?

North Santa Clara RCD

27. Does this project have the commitment of the current owner? If so, at what level?

Positive landowner contact but no formal commitment.

28. Has the necessary environmental compliance and permitting work been completed for this project?

No

28b. Please describe the environmental compliance and permitting pathway below, if known. Please also estimate when you expect compliance and permitting to be completed for this project, if known.

The project is anticipated to require a streamlined environmental review and permitting pathway focused primarily on vegetation management activities within existing roadside corridors, evacuation routes, and adjacent treatment areas in a developed wildland-urban interface environment. Because final treatment locations and methods will be refined during project planning, environmental compliance activities are expected to include project-level biological and cultural resource review, sensitive species and habitat consideration, and evaluation of potential erosion, drainage, and slope stability impacts associated with vegetation management on steep terrain. The project is expected to utilize ecologically sensitive treatment approaches and best management practices designed to minimize ground disturbance, protect water quality, retain appropriate native vegetation, and avoid impacts to sensitive biological resources where feasible.

Potential permitting and compliance coordination may include consultation with CAL FIRE, Santa Clara County, CDFW, and other applicable agencies depending on final treatment locations and methods. Activities occurring near riparian features, drainage crossings, or jurisdictional waters may require additional review to determine whether permits or notifications are necessary. Because much of the proposed work involves vegetation management within existing disturbed roadside environments and developed WUI corridors, portions of the project may qualify for streamlined CEQA review approaches, including potential categorical exemptions related to wildfire risk reduction, emergency access improvements, ecological restoration, or hazardous vegetation management, subject to final project design and agency determination.

29. Does your organization need support to finalize compliance and permitting for this project?

No

29b. What type of support is necessary to complete compliance and permitting? (e.g., technical assistance, consultant support, funding, etc.)

30. Do you have the plan(s), permitting, permission, funding, and capacity to maintain the project area over time? Check all that apply.

Permission

31. Has there been community engagement related to this project?

No

31b. If yes, what kind or how (through what approach or processes) and with whom.

32. Do you need technical assistance or do you have other outstanding needs for this project to be shovel ready and/or implemented

May need technical assistance regarding mapping and/or peer review by qualified experts.

If you have any final notes or comments on the RPP submission process, the survey or any information you would like reviewers to know please use the space below.

This pilot-scale project is intended to demonstrate a scalable, community-based approach to wildfire resilience, ecological stewardship, evacuation preparedness, and neighborhood-scale collaboration within high-risk Santa Cruz Mountains wildland-urban interface communities. By integrating strategic roadside vegetation management, hazardous eucalyptus treatment, watershed-sensitive stewardship practices, neighborhood pod development, and long-term community engagement, the project seeks to improve evacuation safety, reduce wildfire risk, protect ecological and water resources, and strengthen local resilience capacity within the Aldercroft Heights community and surrounding Lexington Basin area. The neighborhood pod component is intended to support collaborative vegetation management, strengthen community preparedness and communication, encourage long-term stewardship participation, and improve coordination across fragmented ownership patterns within the project area. The project builds upon lessons learned from prior community wildfire mitigation efforts and aligns with regional priorities identified in the Santa Cruz Mountains Regional Priority Plan, Santa Clara County Community Wildfire Protection Plan framework, and CAL FIRE Santa Clara Unit Fire Plan. Through this effort, the North Santa Clara RCD intends to establish and evaluate a replicable stewardship model that can help inform future wildfire resilience and ecological restoration initiatives throughout similarly situated mountain communities within the District.

