

CITY OF AUSTIN PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION
June 3, 2013

Resolution with Recommendations Regarding Wildland Fire Risk in Austin

Based on the testimony to this Commission by several respected experts on this subject, including officials of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (charged with the management of the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge) and the Texas Forest Service, this Commission makes the following recommendations to the Austin City Council:

- 1) Increasing pace of dialogue with stakeholders in environmental community to develop appropriate plan for fuel mitigation that can begin being implemented as soon as possible, with resources necessary for this effort including an experienced environmental compliance specialist.
- 2) Because it has been seen in several incidents nationally that non-firefighting agencies attempting vegetative fuel mitigation efforts have ignited major fires resulting in significant loss of lives and property, it is imperative that all such efforts by City of Austin agencies other than the Austin Fire Department (such as the Austin Water Utility and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department) must be put under the direct risk assessment and operational control of the Austin Fire Department, with personnel and equipment being used by these non-AFD agencies for wildfire related activities be re-assigned to the Austin Fire Department to allow it to meet the department's un-met needs related to wildfire prevention and suppression in the 2013-2014 budget as currently proposed.
- 3) AFD be given sufficient funding to allow: a) the purchase of protective clothing and equipment for its personnel; b) the training of its personnel in the methodology of wildland firefighting; c) the ability to bring in off-duty personnel when the National Weather Service declares a "Red Flag Warning" so that additional firefighters are immediately available to attack emerging fires; and, d) funding in AFD's wildfire division for a battalion chief position that is necessary for appropriate command structure.
- 4) AFD be given the authority to develop and implement a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The plan will clarify and refine the City's wildland fire risk and priorities, and will address in detail critical elements such as wildland fire response, risk assessment by area, hazard mitigation, community preparedness and structure protection. (Most structures can have increased fire "resistance", but cannot be made "fireproof".) Five key resource areas will be guided by the CWPP and AFD's wildfire mitigation: 1) public education; 2) communications with the public, officials, and other agencies to assure the success of any plans (which include evacuation planning in coordination with the Austin Police Department); 3) environmentally appropriate fuel mitigation efforts; 4) training; and, 5) regional response plans and coordination.
- 5) The adoption of the International Wildland Interface Code (IWUIC) with modifications recommended by AFD, containing provisions addressing fire spread, accessibility, defensible space, water supply, etc., for all buildings located in or near wildland areas.