



Wildfire Preparedness

Audit originally presented October 2019
Update provided May 26, 2021

Austin Fire Department

Justice Jones, Wildfire Mitigation Officer
Carrie Stewart, Division Chief over Wildfire
Tom Vocke, Fire Marshal

Parks and Recreation Department

Matt McCaw, Program manager



RECOMMENDATION 1



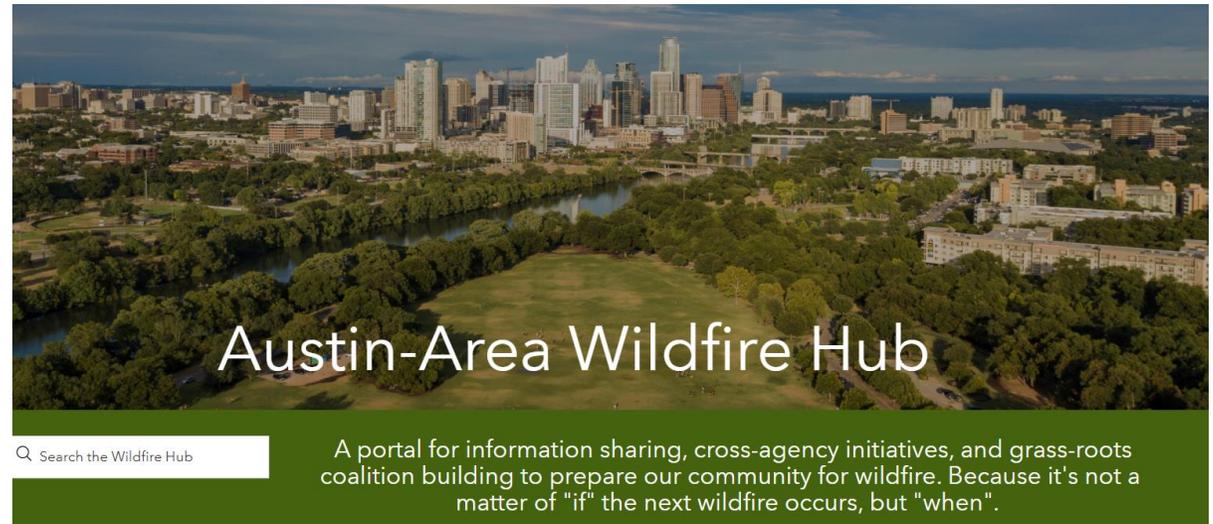
To address data gathering and tracking issues noted in finding 1, the Fire Chief should ensure that Wildfire Division staff receives and reports complete and accurate information about wildfire risk mitigation efforts, including fuel treatments, conducted in the City. This information should be updated and reported publicly at regular intervals. At a minimum, the Fire Chief should:

- a. engage with other entities conducting mitigation efforts in the City to ensure that all efforts are identified, tracked in a consistent format, and provided to the Austin Fire Department;
- b. ensure that field information gathered by staff includes enough detail to accurately document how much land requires treatment, does not require treatment, or cannot be treated; and
- c. report to City management and Council any impediments that prevent this information from being received and reported.



AFD worked with other City entities to:

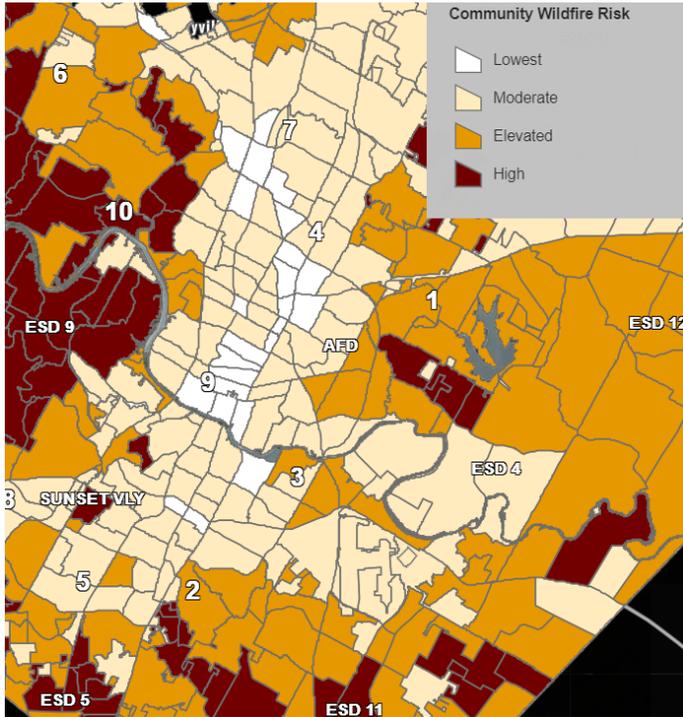
- 1.a. gather comprehensive data on mitigation efforts;
- 1.b. include detailed data elements with regard to the treatment status of the 647 square miles of Wildland-Urban Interface in Austin; and
- 1.c. submit an annual report to City management and Council that includes information on impediments to collecting information.



REC 1

Final Status 11/19/2020

Explore the Austin Area Wildfire Hub at www.ATXWildfire.org or <https://wildfire-austin.hub.arcgis.com/>



The “Austin Area Wildfire Hub” data portal, is a new platform for collaboration, information sharing, cross-agency initiatives, and grass-roots coalition building to prepare our community for wildfire.

It ensures accurate and complete reporting of wildfire mitigation activities and provides a centralized location for wildfire related initiatives in the Austin area. An overview of the Hub was provided to the

- Fire Chief and Asst. City Manager Arellano on Nov. 10, 2020.
- Wildfire Coalition partners December 2020 – March 2021
- City Council April 26, 2021

Since the Hub provides ongoing updates, the need for an annual report is satisfied.

The Hub signifies the final implementation step for Recommendation 1.



Recommendation 2



To address Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) code issues in finding 2, the Fire Chief should ensure that:

- all cost impacts related to WUI code requirements are identified and clearly communicated to City management and Council during the code adoption process and
- key elements of a WUI code are represented in Austin’s WUI code or remain in place as part of another City code.

Note: When reporting on key elements of the proposed Austin WUI code, AFD began with the national model code as it applies to Austin, identified changes from the national code and reasons for those changes, and notified the City Manager and Mayor and Council before the code was adopted.



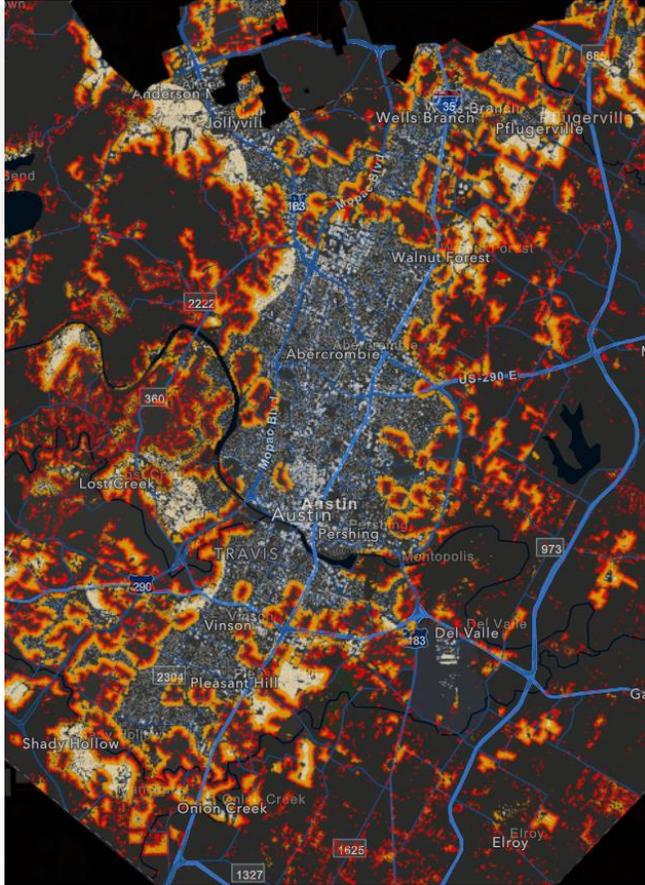
A memo and report was sent to Mayor and Council on Nov. 3, 2020 outlining wildfire prevention efforts and Wildland Urban Interface Code (WUIC) implementation. The report covered:

- Model code strategies not adopted with the WUIC
- Existing vegetation management, fuels mitigation, and community refuge planning
- Roles and responsibilities of homeowners and land management entities
- Path forward including stakeholder engagement
- Overview of developed process and related timelines
- AFD's response to the City of Austin's Environmental Commission



REC 2

Final Status 11/19/2020



Submission of the WUI Code implementation report to City Council on Nov. 3, 2020 signifies full implementation of Recommendation 2.

2015 WUI Code is currently being applied City wide.

Staff is currently reviewing the 2021 International Code Council WUI Code with plans to update to most current version in 2022.



Recommendation 3



To address land management issues in finding 2, the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department should ensure that land management plans:

- a. are drafted for Parks and Recreation properties, with a priority on high-risk properties;
- b. address wildfire risk areas; and
- c. are implemented to reduce the threat of wildfire.



Implementation Plan:

- a. Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) will establish a land management team. In collaboration with the Austin Fire Department (AFD) they will:
 - review parkland for wildfire risk
 - create land management plans prioritizing the identified high-risk properties
 - incorporate annual reviews of parkland for wildfire risk
 - add regular updates of land management plans into the Department's standard operating procedures.
- b. PARD will use the land management plans as a road map for on-the-ground implementation of strategies to reduce wildfire risk.

On-going wildfire reduction work to implement the land management plans requires:

- annual funding of approx. \$100,000.
- collaboration with other Departments
- partnerships with park advocates.

Proposed Implementation Date: May 2021
September 2022 and on-going



REC 3

In Progress



Land Management Team

- PARD has hired a Program Manager and a Program Coordinator to begin the creation of a land management team.

Land Management Plan

- A scope of work for a land management plan is in the procurement process.
- The land management plan will cover roughly 10,350 acres, approximately 75% of parkland natural areas.
- These areas present the greatest opportunity for ecological restoration and reduction of wildfire risk.



REC 3

In Progress



IMPLEMENTATION

- Begun renovating vacant building space to serve as a center of operations.
- Begun creating an internal prescribed burn team. This team will work with entities such as Austin Water Wildland Conservation Division, Travis County Parks, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the UT Wildflower Center, The Nature Conservancy, and Austin Fire Department to plan, prepare, and implement prescribed burns on parkland as well as to provide training to staff.
- Creating cooperative agreements with these organizations for this purpose.
- 83 acres of brush control at the Barrera Indiangrass Preserve for prairie restoration.
- Preparation for ~340 acre prescribed fire at Decker Preserve.
- Management of one Austin Civilian Conservation Corps crew. Implementing several projects across PARD Preserves.



Recommendation 4



To address prescribed burn permitting issues in finding 2, the Fire Chief should ensure the Austin Fire Department:

- creates defined policies and procedures for the Austin Fire Department's prescribed burn permitting process that ensure safety and align with industry guidance;
- considers and issues prescribed burn permits according to these policies so that a cost-effective land management tool is available to help reduce the risk and severity of wildfires; and
- creates guidance related to the prescribed burn permitting process and makes this guidance available to its partner organizations and stakeholders



REC 4

Final Status 10/12/2020



The following documents were submitted to the Auditor's Office in response to this recommendation:

- AFD Prescribed Fire Handbook Version 2.3
- AFD WFD Prescribed Fire Definitions
- AFD WFD Fire Roles and Responsibilities Summary 2020
- AFD Prescribed Fire Permitting Guidelines Version 2.2

Submission of these documents represent full implementation of Recommendation 4.





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QUESTIONS?

