

Amador County Wildfire Collaborators (ACWC) – Meeting Summary

Date: August 12, 2026 **Duration:** 2 hours 25 minutes **Recorder:** Todd Bertwell **Source:** Meeting transcript

Attendees

Amador County

- Jeff Brown – Supervisor, District 3
- Sgt. Matthew Girton – Office of Emergency Services Coordinator
- Barry Clark – Deputy Agricultural Commissioner

Amador Resource Conservation District (ARCD) & Amador Fire Safe Council (AFSC)

- Steve Cannon – Consulting Forester (RPF); Director, ARCD
- John Heissenbuttel – Registered Professional Forester (RPF); Treasurer, Amador Fire Safe Council
- Amanda Watson – Executive Director, ARCD; County Coordinator, Amador Fire Safe Council
- Todd Bertwell – Project Manager, ARCD / AFSC
- Cailin McLaughlin – Project Manager, ARCD / AFSC

CAL FIRE

- Jeff Hoag Assistant Chief, Community Risk Reduction Program, AEU
- Michael Blankenheim - retired
- Charlie Blankenheim - retired

Bureau of Land Management

- Beth Brenneman – Project Manager, Fire & Fuels

CA State Parks

- Heather Reith – Senior Environmental Scientist

Local Fire Agencies

- Kayla Dale – Amador Fire Protection District, Public Information Officer
- Jim Bennet – Engineer, City of Lone Fire Department

Utilities & Infrastructure

- Wes Whited – PG&E

- Todd Crawford – PG&E Public Safety Specialist
- Ty LaBelle – PG&E
- Charles Beckman, East Bay MUD – Manager of Watershed and Recreation
- Frank Leshinsky – Volcano Telephone Company & Board of Directors, AFSC

US Forest Service

- James Thornock, District Fire Management Officer / Chief, Amador Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest

Sierra Pacific Industries

- Chris Dow – South Sierra Vegetation Management Specialist

City of Plymouth

- Cameron Begbie – City Manager

1. CWPP Finalization and City Approvals

Status Update

Amanda Watson reported that the Spatial Informatics Group delivered the nearly finalized Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Most signatures have been collected; a few remain and will be gathered individually. All incorporated cities in Amador County have approved the CWPP except Lone, which is still working through its council process.

Next Steps

- Append Lone's approval once received.
- Publish the final CWPP on the Amador Fire Safe Council and Amador County websites.
- Group acknowledged the significant effort and congratulated contributors.

2. Fire Risk Reduction Community List (FRRCL)

Overview

The group revisited the FRRCL discussion from the prior meeting. Sergeant Matt Gurney researched qualification pathways and met with Amanda and others to evaluate options.

Key Findings

- **Special districts (e.g., RCDs)** face far fewer requirements than counties.
- Amador RCD already meets **at least four qualifying criteria**, including:

- Having a CWPP
 - Engaging with Fire Safe Council and Firewise communities
 - Conducting hazardous fuel reduction projects (e.g., Cal VTP at Jackson Creek)
 - Conducting public outreach on wildfire prevention and vegetation management
- Applications open **mid-2027** for inclusion in the **2028 FRRCL**.

Why It Matters

Two major benefits:

1. **Higher priority for Cal Fire wildfire prevention grants**
2. **Insurance carriers must consider FRRCL status when setting premiums** (Not guaranteed reductions, but mandatory consideration.)

County vs. RCD

- Counties must meet subdivision review and other heavy-lift requirements.
- RCDs do **not** need subdivision compliance.
- RCD jurisdiction covers all of Amador County (plus parts of Alpine County and East Bay MUD lands), making it a practical lead agency.

Jeff Hoag (Cal Fire) emphasized confirming that insurance benefits apply equally when a special district—not a county—leads the application. Matt Girton confirmed the Board of Forestry responded **yes**.

Next Steps

- RCD board review in April.
- Track updates to the application when the new cycle opens.
- Continue coordination with AFD, Cal Fire, and other partners.

3. ACWC Webpage Launch

A new ACWC webpage has been created on the Amador Fire Safe Council site under “Planning and Preparedness.” It currently hosts:

- Group goals

- Charter
- Meeting minutes

The group discussed future document-sharing options, including a backend login via Streamline for draft or non-public materials.

4. Outreach & Education Working Group Proposal

Rationale

Multiple agencies (AFPD, Cal Fire, OES, RCD, Fire Safe Council) conduct wildfire education independently. The group wants:

- Coordinated messaging
- Avoiding duplication
- Ensuring consistent evacuation and preparedness information
- Leveraging each agency's existing audiences

Kayla and Matt have been exploring this since early 2026.

Discussion Highlights

- Chief Hoag emphasized the importance of **consistent messaging across agencies**, especially for evacuations: *"What Matt's saying is the same thing as what Todd's saying... the information is the same."*
- Red Cross was cited as an example of an organization heavily involved in emergency preparedness that AFPD and other county departments want to ensure that messaging to residents is accurate and consistent.
- The group agreed the working group should:
 - Meet regularly (monthly or bi-monthly)
 - Coordinate seasonal messaging (e.g., defensible space in spring, evacuation readiness in fall)
 - Share program updates so field personnel can direct residents to the correct agency

Outcome

No objections were raised. Kayla, Todd, and Cailin will propose meeting dates and convene the first Outreach & Education Working Group session.

5. GIS & Mapping Initiative (Major Topic)

This was the most extensive discussion of the meeting.

Purpose

Develop a **countywide, multi-agency GIS system** that:

- Supports emergency response
- Documents fuel breaks, treatments, access routes, and critical infrastructure
- Preserves institutional knowledge
- Enables regional coordination with neighboring counties
- Provides a foundation for future public-facing story maps

Two Map Categories Identified

1. Strategic planning / Operational Map (internal)

- Fuel break status
- Treatment history
- Access routes
- Critical facilities
- Contingency lines
- Burn scars
- Evacuation performance (what worked/didn't)

2. Public Map (later phase)

- Firewise communities
- Completed fuel breaks
- CWPP outputs
- Non-sensitive layers

The group agreed **priority must be the operational map**, not public-facing layers.

Key Issues & Insights

- **Confidentiality:** Some layers (e.g., PG&E critical facilities) cannot be public.

- **Regional integration:** Fires cross county lines; maps must align with El Dorado, Calaveras, Tuolumne, BLM, USFS, SPI, PG&E datasets.
- **Institutional knowledge loss:** *“If these people retire... we need something better than personal relationships and memories.”*
- **Data fragmentation:** Information currently lives on desktops, agency servers, and personal files.
- **Update frequency:**
 - Every major fire
 - Every major evacuation
 - At least every 6 months
- **Technical backbone:**
 - ArcGIS Online likely the platform
 - Need shared layers, permissions, and standardized attribute tables
 - Must avoid overly complex structures that become unmaintainable

Existing Resources

Todd noted the California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force maintains statewide treatment data, updated through 2024. This provides a baseline structure for attributes and data formatting.

Major Barrier

No GIS specialist available to build or maintain the system. County GIS capacity is minimal; RCD and Fire Safe Council rely on grant-funded staff.

Funding Discussion

- Consultant likely required for initial build.
- Estimated cost for platform establishment: ~\$200,000 (rough conceptual figure).
- Cal Fire grants could support GIS as part of a larger fuels project.
- Private partners (PG&E, East Bay MUD) may contribute.
- Workforce development components could train county staff for long-term maintenance.

Next Steps

1. **RCD & Fire Safe Council will lead grant development.**
2. **Jeff Hoag will coordinate with Cal Fire GIS specialist Laura Spellman** to advise on structure and requirements.
3. **Small working group** (Jeff, Mike, Todd, Amanda, others) will meet offline to draft:
 - Project design
 - Consultant scope
 - RFQ framework
4. Present draft project design at the **October 14, 2026 ACWC meeting**.

6. Meeting Logistics & Closing

- Next full ACWC meeting: **October 14, 2026**
- GIS working group will operate between meetings
- Outreach & Education working group will begin scheduling
- Members reminded to sign in before leaving

Summary of Major Decisions

CWPP

- Final signatures underway; publish once lone approves.

FRRCL

- RCD will pursue 2027 application for 2028 list.

Outreach & Education

- New working group approved; Kayla/Todd/Cailin to schedule.

GIS & Mapping

- Operational map prioritized.
- RCD/Fire Safe Council will lead grant pursuit.
- Consultant likely required.
- Small working group formed to draft project design.