

Marin's Evolving History of Wildfire and Wildfire Management

Throughout Marin's history, wildfires have been an important part of our landscape, shaping the terrain, renewing our forests, and regenerating our environment. Climate change has shifted and intensified weather patterns, causing drought periods that make more fuels available to burn. As a result, the wildfires today move faster, burn hotter, and are more intense than anything we've seen in the past. Over the years we have also seen urban expansion into the wilderness, which has changed our relationship with wildfire. Once largely considered a forest phenomenon, wildfires now threaten our homes and communities directly.

Over time, Marin County's response to wildfire has evolved too. For much of the last century, the goal was to suppress fire whenever possible. This strategy was effective in preventing wildfire from spreading to our towns and cities. However, it also had the unintended consequence of allowing our forest to become severely overgrown. Concurrently, the effects of climate change were intensifying. Drought coupled with overgrowth, diseased trees, and the proliferation of invasive species made our wildlands a tinderbox of fuels. Urban development also increased during this time. New homes were built high on the hills of our mountains and in forest areas – the most dangerous places to be during a wildfire and the most difficult to protect.

Climate change has shifted and intensified weather patterns



Fortunately, advancements in wildfire and environmental sciences led the way to a new program of wildfire management. Today's efforts seek to **restore the health of forests** by thinning out undergrowth, allowing young native trees the room to grow and leaving habitat to support biodiversity. With an emphasis on **wildfire mitigation**, our fire agencies work with residents to harden their homes and prepare their yards to resist ember ignitions. Better **wildfire detection and alert systems, emergency planning, and clearance of evacuation routes** greatly improve our community's ability to evacuate safely if needed. All this is made possible through the creation of the **Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority** that coordinates 17 fire agencies' efforts into a consolidated plan that evolves with the conditions and needs of our community.

A look back at some of the benchmarks in Marin's wildfire history and management shows how this story has evolved.

WILDFIRES

The Tamalpais Fire, called "The Greatest Forest Fire in the History of Marin" on the cover of the San Francisco Call on Oct 9, 1899. It started at Mt. Tam, burned into Mill Valley and threatened Corte Madera and Larkspur before being extinguished by rain.

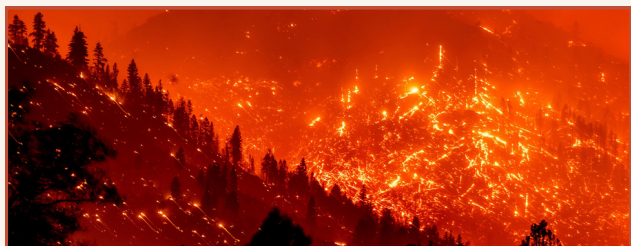
The Lucas Valley Fire, occurring in September, swept through Ignacio, Lucas and Nicasio Valleys, reaching Woodacre, Lagunitas, and Bolinas Ridge. At the same time, a wildfire spread from Calistoga to Santa Rosa along the same path as the 1964 Hanley Fire and the 2017 Tubbs. On that same day a fire burned from the Berkeley Hills eventually destroying half of the City of Berkeley. 15 other California counties also had major fires underscoring the correlation between changing weather patterns and fire conditions.

The Mill Valley Fire in July raged for three days, consuming 2500 acres and laying waste to 117 homes.



The Oakland Hills Fire (officially called the Tunnel Fire) started as a grass fire in Berkeley Hills, the fire destroyed 3,000 homes and killed 25 people.

The Vision Fire, spanning 12,354 acres, destroying 45 homes in Inverness, and costing \$6.2 million, highlighted the cooperative efforts of suppression resources and fire crews from across the state.



The catastrophic North Bay fires and the lesson learned report that was published following the fires helped lay the groundwork for organizing a countywide agency in Marin.

The Woodward Fire burned nearly 5,000 acres of Point Reyes National Seashore land.

FIRE MANAGEMENT



The Tamalpais Forest Fire District was established, marking the inception of the first legally constituted forest fire district in the State of California.



The Marin County Fire Department was officially created.

1899

1917

1923

1929

1941

1980's

1991

1992

1995

2017

2020

2022-3

The College of Marin responded to the growing need by establishing a fire science program.



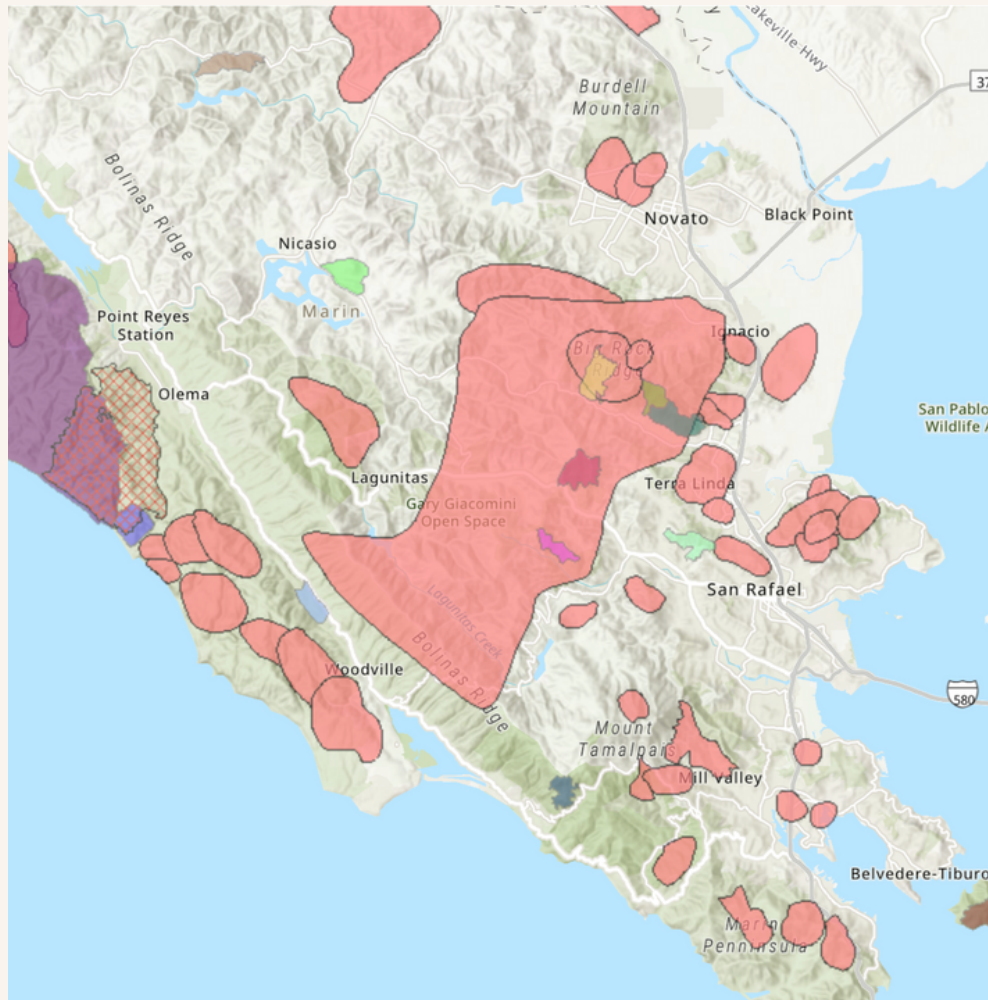
Fire Safe Marin was founded, providing crucial outreach and education support to fire agencies throughout Marin County in their mission to protect life, property, and the environment.



Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority was created and funded by a voter parcel tax.

The Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority has **conducted over 110,000 Wildfire Risk Evaluations** on homes throughout the county, **cleared over 53 miles of evacuation routes**, **removed over 2.8 tons of fuel**, **created 72 miles of shaded fuel breaks**, and **educated the public** to do their part in wildfire prevention.

This map shows the perimeters of fires larger than 200 acres that have occurred in Marin from 1878 to 2019.



(data are from CAL FIRE California Fire Perimeters 1878 to 2019)

What YOU can do:

- **Harden your home:** install fire-resistant vents, screen and clear under your deck, and replace wooden gates or fences that connect to the house with non-combustible materials.
- **Create defensible space:** clear the 5ft next to your house of any combustible items, trim up trees, create space between plants, remove hazardous plants like Italian cypress and juniper, and maintain your landscaping by regularly removing dead or dying vegetation.
- **Make a plan:** know your evacuation routes, sign up for alerts, and join your local Firewise neighborhood to prepare together.

