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PRESIDENT’S NOTE
TRIAL BY FIRE

Year 2020 showcases the strengths of the FireSafe Council team. Our Staff, our Advisors and our Board all stepped up during a leadership transition that spanned much of the year. I was proud when SCCFSC was recognized as a critical essential service in Santa Clara County and the State of California in April of 2020. As our world turned upside down, SCCFSC went through a whole organization covid pivot. That we came through this trial by fire stronger than when we went in, is a testament to the remarkable leadership of Eugenia Rendler, our Interim Executive Director and now Managing Director of Operations.

The past years’ fires in Santa Clara and surrounding counties made clear to everyone, the urgent and critical nature of our mission. Buoyed by the support of the community, and the energy, creativity and organizational skills of our new CEO, Seth Schalet, the Santa Clara County Firesafe Council stands ready to mobilize the people of the county to protect their homes, communities and environment from wildfire.
I am thrilled to have joined the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council in early November as its CEO. At the time I joined, the SCU Lightning Complex fires burned a total of 396,624 acres from August 16 to October 1, 2020, making it the third-largest wildfire recorded in California’s modern history. A large portion of this was in Santa Clara County. Together with the LNU and August complex fires crystalized for me just how vital and urgent our mission of mobilizing the people of Santa Clara County to protect their homes, communities and environment from wildfires truly is. I want to thank our partners at Cal Fire for taking me on a tour of the damage contained within part of Henry Coe State Park, experiencing the wildfire devastation firsthand, seeing the command center and logistical field operations up close, speaking with the fire crews, hearing their stories to truly connect the dots on why I joined and why we can’t rest on our laurels, even in winter. Evidence based research indicates California’s fire season is starting earlier and extending longer than in prior years. Therefore, we must rise to meet that challenge for Santa Clara County.

I also want to tip my hat to all of our partners, to our Board of Directors and Advisory Board members, to all the SCCFSC staff and especially to Eugenia Rendler for her work bringing me up to speed on our projects, educating me (patiently I might add) and being a strategic thought partner on how we build on our success. Special acknowledgement to Board Chair, Dede Smullen, whose collaboration and partnership has been invaluable.

As we peer into the 2021 crystal ball, COVID is still with us, but in many respects, it has made us a more flexible and more responsive organization. What continuing impacts it may have on our operations and for how long isn’t fully clear as I write this, but contingency planning and leveraging our new strategic plan are building blocks that position us for a stronger future. We look forward to engaging with each in 2021 and beyond.
2020 – A year of significant challenges, transitions and ultimately key accomplishments

As the year was just getting underway with new leadership, COVID 19 closed down activities across the country and the world. During August, Bay Area counties experienced record setting wildfires. In support, SCCFSC rolled out new levels of social media messaging both with sharing and original content. We supported our residents with information from shelter locations, go bag packing lists, evacuation information and maps from official sources to fielding calls from worried out of state family members. Multiple members of our staff and board of directors were themselves evacuated. Other members of our staff were deployed to incident command teams or to the Santa Clara County Office of Emergency Management for large animal evacuation duties.

Our Communications, Outreach and Education Program (COE) was forced to adapt all of our speaker series and written materials to video and electronic copies. Our website became a primary interaction tool for residents to obtain information for their continuing efforts in wildfire mitigation. We introduced our Shelter-in-Yard series to encourage homeowners to take care of their property’s wildfire risk while being “stuck” at home, creating illustrated flyers outlining tasks for defensible space creation and home hardening. This was a big success.

Our Hazardous Fuels Reduction (HFR) Program completed the important State Route 17 project in May 2020 after a short down period to implement the proper safety protocols. Since its completion, SR17 Fuel Break has stopped multiple car fires from spreading into the woodland areas and becoming catastrophic wildfires. We played a key role forming the Los Gatos Watershed Health Collaborative to apply for our County’s first Forest Health Grant. We are looking forward to the continued success of this large important undertaking reducing the impact of sudden oak death, invasive species and hazardous fuels in this watershed.

Ultimately our growth and newly adopted Strategic Plan has made room for larger operations, more important collaborations with partners and a growing array of community services. I am pleased to continue to serve our county’s residents as the Managing Director of Operations while our leadership expands with the addition of Seth Schalet, our new CEO.
Impact At A Glance

Our mission is to mobilize the people of Santa Clara County to prepare their property in order to mitigate the potential for destruction from wildfire. We are mobilizing our community to protect their environment through education and hazardous fuel reduction.

20 Wildfire Safety Education presentations and workshops given in 2020.

4 new Firewise neighborhoods and multiple community annual renewals by supporting neighborhoods. The program teaches communities how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to take action to prevent losses.

27.5 miles* of escape route cleared and 21+ acres of fuel reduction completed.

(*14 miles x both sides of the road)

91 HIZ completed assessments even with shelter in place mandates that impacted our ability to perform.
Community Partner Award

We couldn’t do it without our partners!

Recognition for our contributions to the community in reducing hazardous fire fuels and helping make residences safer from wildfire.
Communications, Outreach and Education Program

Engaging the residents in hands on workshops where knowledge and neighborhood collaboration grow.
COE Success: Firewise Communities, Successful pivot to webinars and more...

Communication, Outreach and Education ...

- Firewise four new communities in 2020!
- Five Firewise renewals supported plus communities renewing on their own. Santa Clara County has 12 Firewise Communities and growing. Up from 1 when the SCCFSC program began.
- New Shelter in Yard helped people do defensible space during shelter in place restrictions.
- Convert presentations to webinars
- Convert brochures to electronic copy
- Upgrade usability of website and electronic library for public
Hazardous Fuel Reduction Programs

We managed wildfire risk mitigation projects to reduce the amount of dead and overgrown vegetation around homes and roads in order to protect critical infrastructure, businesses, communities, and residences.
Skyline Blvd. runs between Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties along a ridge in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It is a narrow mountain road that serves multiple mountain communities. Thousands of residents use this road every day, yet there are certain sections that would be impassable in the event of a wildfire. The Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council in partnership with the South Skyline Fire Safe Council has completed Phase II of an Escape Route / Shaded Fuel Break project on a portion of the roadway known locally as the Goat Trail.

Project Goals included:
- Trim woody vegetation, limb up ladder fuels and remove accumulated dead fuel build up along the roadway.
- Remove large down trees that may pose a fire hazard during drier months.
- Conduct hazardous fuel reduction up to 30-50' from the road edge.
- Removal of hazard trees; dead, dying, under-slung and overhanging that may fall on the roadway in a wind event.
- Educate the property owners along that stretch of roadway about what they can do on their properties to make living in the wildland urban interface safer.

Wildfire does not recognize property lines, county boundaries or jurisdictions. This highly collaborative escape route/ fuel break project is an example of how many types of agencies and private landowners can work together to live, work and play more safely in the beautiful wildland urban interface of the South Bay Area and Santa Cruz Mountains.

We look forward to building more collaborations in the future.
Highway 17 Wrap Up

By the numbers

- Largest collaborative effort ever for SCCFSC
- More than a dozen key alliance partners
- Cleared a high risk 6.5 mile segment on both sides
- More than 400 acres treated

Proof of Benefit: multiple subsequent roadside car fires that did not burn into the wildlands

Satellite Projects-the connector roads

Idyllwild Road
Hebard Road
Cats Restaurant Area
Old Santa Cruz Highway
Reineri Lane
Mtn. Charlie Road
Highly flammable eucalyptus trees were removed to allow native trees and plants to thrive and protect on important stretch of Page Mill Road, critical for ingress and egress in a potential wildfire incident.

Passive restoration under oak overstory will be overseen by project partner, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. Grasslands were seeded under MROSD guidelines and direction.

200 non-native hazard trees removed.

Tall eucalyptus along road overgrowing the native oaks and large enough to block road if they fell during a wildfire.
In late 2019, the SCC FireSafe Council Board set out to author all new 5-Year Strategic Plan, motivated by recent wildfire events within the County and across the State.

This plan was to deliver two important outcomes for the Council: first, to be a catalyst for organizational alignment, improving focus and operational efficiencies; and secondly, to provide a roadmap of critical priorities and goals we aspire to achieve over our planning horizon.

Then Covid-19 struck. Yet with determination (and Zoom), the Council drafted our 5-Year Strategic Plan with four primary Goals as our priorities, each with detailed strategic initiatives and tactical approaches to achieve the desired outcomes. In June, the 2020 5-Year Strategic Plan was published and made available for all to see.

This Plan amplified the need for Staff and Board growth, and improve operational efficiencies while adding an expanded fundraising program. The Plan outlined our focus on community engagements, and importantly, how we build partnerships and collaborations to secure large scale grants and initiatives. And lastly, our Plan looks forward to where the future will be and best to prepare for that time.

We have much to do. Please join us in building the organizational capabilities, partner support and funding resources we need to grow and deliver on our Mission.
Ensure long-term success for the organization through a strong leadership team aligned to Goals, driven by a capable workforce and efficient systems, with sufficient baseline funding to deliver ongoing core operations and support new growth initiatives.

1. Build Leadership Team
   - Develop and Conduct Board Orientation and Training
   - Identify Organization Leadership Requirements
   - Align Board Strengths to Vision and Goals

2. Develop Capable and Competent Workforce
   - Establish Common Goals and Expectations
   - Develop Core Competencies through Training (New Hire, On-going)

3. Optimize Operational Capabilities
   - Identify Operational Requirements
   - Create Organization Resource Plan
   - Monitor and Align Resources to Address Gaps

4. Establish Sustainable Funding
   - Identify Baseline Funding and In-Kind Needs
   - Prioritize Funding Opportunities
   - Publish 5-year Financial Forecast to Meet Vision
   - Ensure Adequate Staffing and Board Commitment to Meet Funding Goals
Goal 2: Develop Resilient Neighborhoods

Educate and facilitate engaged communities to improve neighborhood fire resiliency through fuel reduction initiatives, services, and partner collaborations. Expand support for FireWise certifications across County.

1. Expand Community Outreach
   - Expand Our Volunteer Corps
   - Leverage Social Media, Website with Mobile-Friendly Communications
   - Develop Content with Consistent Terms and Language, Multi-lingual
   - Develop SCCFSC Owned Outreach Programs and Events

2. Identify, Nurture and Enable Key Community Leaders to Maximize our Reach
   - Identify Community Needs and Near-Term Actions
   - Develop Content to Enable Local Neighborhood Initiatives
   - Expand FireWise communities

3. Expand Effective Neighborhood Fuel Reduction Programs
   - Accelerate HIZ Programs
   - Broaden Chipping Programs
   - Facilitate Neighbor to Neighbor Programs
Drive large-scale fuel reduction and forest health initiatives with the support of partners and sponsors, often funded by local, State and Federal grants. Champion the CWPP as the Countywide strategy for executing priority projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 3: Collaborate on County and Regional Wildfire Preparation Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Implement Landscape Scale Fuel Reduction Projects</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Promote the Forest Health initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Create (WUI) Fire Breaks and Shaded Fuel Breaks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Promote Adoption and Implementation of CWPP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Adopt the SCCFSC Annex of CWPP</td>
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<td>- Promote Adoption and Updating of All CWPP Annexes, Including Mapping</td>
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<td>- Reconvene Stakeholders to Execute CWPP Projects</td>
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<td><strong>3. Collaborate with Partners</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identify Potential Partnerships and Collaborations</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Create and Promote Service Offerings Aligned with Partner Needs</td>
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Look 5 years forward and explore highly innovative solutions to reduce our growing fire threat, including advanced technologies and state-of-art fire protection capabilities. Explore strategic alliances across industry and State/Federal Legislature for long-term and substantial impact.

1. Perform Industrywide Assessment of New Processes and Technologies
   - Explore Industry Best Practices, Technologies, and Potential Alliance Partners
   - Construct 5-Year Vision and Strategic Roadmap

2. Develop Industry Collaborations to Drive Vision
   - Identify Sponsors and Partners
   - Build Shared Vision and Common Goals, Identify Long-Term Objectives
   - Collaborate with Partners for Funding, Resources, and Technologies

3. Understand Legislative Changes and Trends Impacting Programs
   - Identify any Legislative or Environmental Changes
   - Develop Solutions to Reduce Risks

4. Establish County - State - Federal Advocacy programs
   - Create Strong, Unified Voice to Advocate Policy and Funding Reform
   - Establish External Champions to Amplify Influence
   - Form Alliances to Enhance Delivery of our Mission
Income 2020

### Income by Category 2019 vs 2020

#### Pie Chart:
- State Grants: $5,196,422.98 (79%)
- Federal Grants: $13,091.06 (1%)
- Local Grants and Donations: $468,768.12 (11%)
- Interest Earned: $234,50 (0%)
- In-kind contributions: $3,757.64 (0%)

#### Bar Chart:
- Federal Grants: [Data]
- State Grants: [Data]
- Local Grants and Donations: [Data]
- Interest Earned: [Data]
- In-kind contributions: [Data]

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Income 2020
Expenses 2020

Expenses by Category 2019 vs 2020

2020 Expenses by Program

- Hazardous Fuel Reduction Programs, $4,139,256.37, 86%
- Community Outreach and Education Programs, $192,204.16, 2%
- Management and General, $557,447.92, 12%
- Early Warning Camera System (EWS), $1,544.14, 0%
- Fundraising, $13,609.12, 0%
- Hazardous Fuel Assessment and Strategy Programs, $19,713.59, 0%
Our Donors

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Ajay Rangaswamy Devaraj
Alicia Renee
Amy Korb
Anamitra Dutta Majumdar
Anonymous
Benjamin Berry
Chang Hsiao
Dana Marcus
David Bivolcic
Dawn McCale
Dede Smullen
Doyle Moeller
Erika Ameri
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Lori Morris
Lou Ann Winchell
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Neesha Modi
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Sara Williams
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Sergey Okinchuk
Seth Schalet
Shana Nelson
Shirley Miao
Shweta Vartak
Sunil Ashtaputre
Susan McLain
Tara Wallichs
Tejala Thippetswamy
The Robert and Loretta Burns Family Charitable Fund
Thomas Sutfin
Walatka
Weijia Shang
William Adams
Yanmin Tao

GRANT FUNDERS
CAL FIRE
California FireSafe Foundation

OTHER SUPPORTERS
Santa Clara County Fire
Saratoga Fire District
City of Saratoga
City of Palo Alto
What’s Next …

- Continuing our work on the Los Gatos Creek Watershed Collaborative for the CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant application.

- Working on strengthening our partnerships with local city government and county agencies.

- Building a robust pipeline for new board members throughout Santa Clara County.

- Strengthening our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion across our organization.

- Increasing our programming in large animal evacuation workshops.