

# Equity & Wildfire Resilience: Recommendations for Ventura County

A Bren School of Environmental Science & Management project in collaboration with the Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council (VRFSC)

Executive Summary

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## The Wildfire Inequity Problem

Social marginalization can limit a community's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildfire. While wildfires have broad regional impacts, factors like income, citizenship, language, age, and residence time can disproportionately reduce wildfire preparedness for certain people. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) are a tool communities across California use to manage wildfire risk, including in fire-prone areas like Ventura County. However, CWPPs do not effectively include marginalized communities or address inequities in wildfire preparedness and resilience because there are systemic barriers to engaging them.

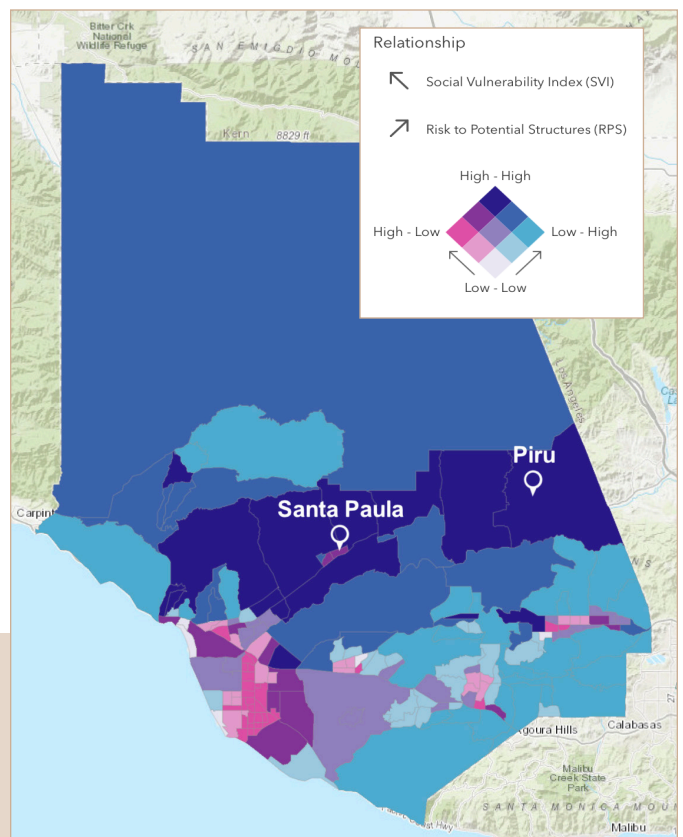
This project identifies vulnerable populations and proposes community engagement recommendations that will help wildfire managers break the link between marginalization and wildfire vulnerability. Through surveys and focus groups, Ventura County residents highlighted barriers to wildfire preparedness and suggested potential solutions. Their feedback is included in wildfire risk management recommendations to Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council for their revision of the county CWPP.

## Ventura County

Current wildfire planning and management activities in Ventura County do not equitably prepare all residents for wildfires. This was illustrated during focus groups in areas identified as vulnerable to wildfire and in a county-wide survey. The results revealed that non-English speakers, women, people of color, and newer residents face disproportionate barriers to wildfire preparedness, particularly evacuation preparedness.

For example, non-English speakers and older adults are less likely to know when to leave or have alternative housing. Women are likely to be concerned about access to resources that allow them to safely evacuate their families.

**Social vulnerability and wildfire risk in Ventura County.** Risk to Potential Structures (wildfire risk) and the Social Vulnerability Index are intersected in each census tract to show where wildfire vulnerability is high. Santa Paula and Piru are highly marginalized communities that face high wildfire risk and are where focus groups took place.



## Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following strategies should be integrated into the updated CWPP:

### Expand traditional risk mitigation education activities and communications

Target vulnerable residents in outreach and communications efforts

Tailor materials and training opportunities for non-English speakers

### Connect directly with affected communities

Solicit direct feedback in community conversations

Establish inclusive, decision-making structures, like a community advisory committee

Strengthen partnerships with existing community organizations

### Employ strategies from other fields

Develop a fund to provide post-fire financial support

Require equity and community engagement training for fire managers

Collaborate with community groups who work with marginalized residents

## Wildfire Planning and Policy Implications

Residents in Ventura County who experience heightened marginalization and risk of wildfire have unique needs that should be included in the CWPP revision process. The program and policy recommendations above enhance wildfire resilience in Ventura County and begin to dissolve the association between marginalization and wildfire vulnerability.

This project demonstrates effective methods and lessons learned for responsible engagement with historically-excluded communities in the development of wildfire management plans, which has policy implications throughout the Western United States. Other communities and Fire Safe Councils in California and beyond can refer to these methods as a template for updating their own CWPPs. Continued efforts to make community wildfire planning, and disaster planning more broadly, more responsive to the vulnerabilities of socially-marginalized communities will enhance resilience and equity.

*Bren School of Environmental Science & Management, University of California, Santa Barbara*

*With support from Dr. Sarah E. Anderson and Louis Graup.*

*Funded by Wonder Labs and Dipaola Foundation.*



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