



Butte County Administration

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August 8, 2019

The Honorable Tamara L. Mosbarger, Presiding Judge
Butte County Superior Court
One Court Street
Oroville, CA 95965

RE: Response to the 2018-2019 Butte County Grand Jury Final Report

Honorable Judge Mosbarger:

Pursuant to Penal Code 933 and 933.5, the Chief Administrative Officer submits the following response to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury's 2018-2019 Final Report.

2018-2019 Butte County Grand Jury Final Report
The Camp Fire – Lessons Learned

FINDINGS

F1. The 2008-2009 Grand Jury recommendation to widen the shoulders and turnouts along existing evacuation roads has not been funded.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F2. The Butte County General Plan 2030 addresses plans to study potential improvement projects to upgrade existing evacuation roads; nine years after adoption, these studies have not been completed.

Response: The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. Although all the studies have not been completed, many have, which have resulted in the completion of several large projects such as the construction of Forest Highway 171 and Skyway fuel reduction programs. The County is continually searching for funding sources that will allow more studies and projects to be completed

F3. Allocated funds for studies to identify additional evacuation routes and improvements to existing roads have not been used.

Response: The respondent disagrees with the finding. The funds referenced in the Grand Jury report are for consultants to work on elements of the General Plan 2030, not for studies to identify additional evacuation routes and improvements to existing roads.

F6. Because there is only a single roadway in and out of communities such as Cohasset, Concow, Berry Creek and others, it is critical to have evacuation routes free of roadside vegetation

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F9. There are not enough designated temporary refuge/assembly/greenbelt areas within high-risk communities to accommodate trapped evacuees.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F11. During evacuations the flow of outbound traffic was slowed when surrounding communities were unprepared for the large influx of evacuating vehicles.

Response: The respondent partially agrees with the finding. Many factors contributed to the slow-down of outbound traffic, which also included downed power lines, abandoned and burned vehicles, and limited visibility. Additionally, under the best of circumstances, the roads are not designed to carry that many vehicles. It took time to set up contraflow with other agencies.

F12. Disaster planning challenges, as specified in the 2013 Butte County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, are not being addressed.

Response: The respondent neither agrees nor disagrees with the finding, as the respondent is unable to ascertain challenges specified in the 2014 Butte County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (note there is no 2013 plan).

F15. Butte County Sheriff's Office deputies lack fire-resistant outerwear.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F16. Aerial infrared cameras can be an effective tool to assist emergency personnel in a crisis.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F17. Butte County may not be maximizing the use of grants available for fire prevention and management.

Response: The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. County departments whose responsibility includes fire prevention and management continually seek for and apply for grant funding. While there is always room for improvement, departments have received a significant number of grants over the years.

F18. Promotion of community programs for citizens requiring additional assistance to alert and aid them in evacuation is not adequate.

Response: The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. The County has a Special Needs Awareness Program (SNAP) that alerts and helps individuals with special needs. Promotion of the program is an ongoing effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R3. The Butte County Department of Development Services should increase enforcement of current laws related to fuel reduction and defensible space, prior to January 1, 2020.

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis. Current laws related to fuel reduction and defensible space include those that are under the authority of the State and those that are under the authority of the County. Defensible space and fuel reduction laws in the State Responsibility Area of the foothills is under the authority of the State, and therefore the County has no control over them. The County has a weed abatement ordinance that is aimed at fuel reduction and defensible space, which is limited to the unincorporated areas within the spheres of influence of the cities of Chico, Oroville, and the Town of Paradise. The Butte County Fire Department, the agency that enforces these laws, will be presenting recommended updates to the weed abatement ordinance to the Board of Supervisors in the fall of 2019.

- R4. The Board of Supervisors should allocate additional funding to the Butte County Sheriff's Office to expand the "Sheriff's Work Alternative Program" for use in vegetation reduction along evacuation routes, prior to January 1, 2020.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. The idea of expanding programs to reduce vegetation is meritorious. However, that idea must be considered within the context of all other needs that the County has. The budget process which takes place in the spring of every year, which culminates in budget hearings, is the appropriate venue to discuss unfunded program expansions. In addition to funding, the Sheriff needs the right type of inmates who would meet the requirements of the Alternative Custody Supervision program, which does the vegetation reduction work. Due to a variety of factors, it is not always possible.

- R8. The Butte County Office of Emergency Management should establish an educational campaign for Special Needs Assistance Program for citizens requiring additional assistance during an evacuation, prior to January 1, 2020.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The Department of Employment and Social Services has a Special Needs Awareness Program (SNAP) in place, and regularly publicizes it and looks for ways to increase participation.

- R9. The Butte County Board of Supervisors should enact roadside vegetation clearance requirements that are enforceable throughout Butte County, prior to January 1, 2020.

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis. In the fall of 2019 the Butte County Fire Department will present recommended changes to the County weed abatement ordinance, which could include roadside vegetation clearance requirements.

R11. The Butte County Office of Emergency Management should establish multi-platform emergency notification systems to augment the current CodeRED alert system, prior to January 1, 2020.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. In addition to CodeRED the County uses the Emergency Alert System, the Wireless Emergency Alert System, Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, social media, traditional media, unique evacuation sirens on Sheriff's vehicles, as well as door-to-door notifications.

R13. The Butte County Office of Emergency Management should acquire infrared-equipped drones to aid in spotting fire locations, prior to January 1, 2020.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Unmanned aircraft systems are useful tools, and are the legal jurisdiction of CAL FIRE, not the County.

R14. The Board of Supervisors should fund one temporary grant-writing position for the next fiscal year to take advantage of the fire-related monies now available.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Staff from various departments and contracted grant writers already search for and apply for grants.

Sincerely,



Shari McCracken
Butte County Chief Administrative Officer

C: Board of Supervisors