

Amador County Wildfire Collaborators – Meeting Summary

Date: June 10, 2026 **Location:** Amador County **Duration:** ~1 hour 40 minutes

Attendees

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

- **Amanda Watson – Executive Director, ARCD; County Coordinator, Amador Fire Safe Council**
- **Todd Bertwell – Natural Resource Project Manager, ARCD / AFSC**
- **Gordon Long – Forestry Project Manager, ARCD & Fire Safe Council**
- **Cailin McLaughlin – Outreach & Administration Coordinator, ARCD & Fire Safe Council**
- **Steve Cannon – Consulting Forester (RPF); Director, ARCD**
- **John Heissenbuttel – Registered Professional Forester (RPF); Treasurer, Amador Fire Safe Council**

CAL FIRE

- **Jeff Hoag – Assistant Chief, Community Risk Reduction Program, AEU**
- **Mike Blankenheim – Retired CAL FIRE; currently representing Amador & El Dorado counties in fuel reduction coordination**
- **Charlie Blankenheim - Retired CAL FIRE**

Local Fire Agencies

- **Randy Makemson – Fire Chief, Jackson Valley Fire Protection District**
- **Arron Watkins – Battalion Chief, Amador Fire Protection District**

County Government

- **Jeff Brown – Amador County Supervisor, District 3**
- **Dan Epperson – Amador County Supervisor, District 2**
- **Matthew Girton – Sergeant, Amador County Sheriff's Office; Office of Emergency Services Coordinator**
- **Eric Mayberry – Agricultural Commissioner**

- **Barry Clark – Deputy Agricultural Commissioner / Deputy Sealer, Weights & Measures**
- **Herminia Perry – Air Pollution Control Officer, Amador Air District**

Utilities & Infrastructure

- **Rick Carroll – Operating Engineering Manager, Amador Water Agency**
- **Frank Leshinsky – Public Sector Manager, Volcano Communications Group; Board Member, Amador Fire Safe Council; LEAP Committee Member**
- **David Johnson – Senior Ranger, East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), Mokelumne Watershed**

Federal Agencies

- **James Thornock – District Fire Management Officer / Chief, Amador Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest**
- **Ronnie Martinez – Fuels Technician, Amador Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest**

Industry

- **Christopher Dow – Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), Area Vegetation Management Specialist**

1. Opening, Context, and Purpose of the Meeting

The meeting marked the **first gathering of the Amador County Wildfire Collaborators for 2026**, and the first convening following completion of the updated **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)**. Todd Bertwell opened the session, welcoming attendees and confirming remote participants could hear the discussion. The early transcript includes informal conversation, then transitions into the formal start:

“Good afternoon. Thanks everyone for coming. We are for our first... Amador County Wildfire Collaborators meeting. It’s our first meeting after the CWPP process.”

Amanda Watson (Executive Director, Amador RCD & County Coordinator for the Fire Safe Council) framed the purpose: **to operationalize the CWPP**, strengthen coordination, and build durable partnerships that support project development and funding.

“What we’re really hoping this group can do is... help us develop projects and get more funding into the county to implement all of the great work identified in the CWPP and keep that CWPP active.”

The meeting included introductions from ~25 participants representing fire agencies, county departments, utilities, forestry professionals, federal partners, and private industry.

2. Participant Introductions & Stated Goals

Each attendee shared their organizational role and their goals for the collaboration. Despite diverse missions, **strong alignment emerged around several themes:**

2.1. Shared Themes

- **Interagency coordination** to avoid duplication and maximize impact
- **Fuel reduction and shaded fuel break continuity** across jurisdictions
- **GIS mapping of treatments** for operational readiness
- **Grant collaboration** to strengthen competitiveness
- **Infrastructure protection** (water, communications, utilities)
- **Insurance risk reduction** and community resilience
- **Long-term maintenance and monitoring** of treatment areas
- **Cross-county coordination**, especially with Calaveras and El Dorado

2.2. Selected Highlights from Introductions

Gordon Long (RCD/Fire Safe Council) described active grant writing and the need for partnership-based proposals.

Ronnie Martinez (CAL FIRE) stressed strengthening relationships and fuel break networks.

Steve Cannon (RCD Director, RPF) highlighted the need for a **countywide database** of all vegetation management work.

Jeff Hoag (CAL FIRE) emphasized a **holistic resiliency strategy**, including defensible space, home hardening, and insurance challenges.

Charlie Blankenheim (retired CAL FIRE) advocated for a **GIS system accessible to night-shift incident commanders**, noting past fires where lack of maps hindered operations.

County Supervisors Jeff Brown & Epperson focused on:

- Green waste disposal access
- Insurance rate stabilization
- Non-native invasive species (Scotch broom, tree-of-heaven)

Rick Carroll (Amador Water Agency) emphasized watershed protection and ensuring staff access during emergencies.

Volcano Communications stressed protecting telecom infrastructure and offering broadband support during fire camps.

SPI (Sierra Pacific Industries) emphasized preventing catastrophic fire impacts like those experienced during the Camp Fire.

USFS Amador Ranger District reinforced the need for connected fuel breaks across boundaries.

Agricultural Commissioner's Office focused on invasive species management and safe pesticide use.

Amador Air District emphasized air quality coordination.

Across all introductions, **mapping and shared situational awareness** emerged as the strongest common priority.

3. Charter Review and Purpose of the Collaboration

Amanda presented the **draft collaboration charter**, explaining its purpose:

- Provide a **baseline “why”** for the group
- Document goals and structure for new members
- Demonstrate collaboration to state/federal funders
- Avoid creating a new formal organization
- Maintain the CWPP as a **living document**
- Establish meeting cadence (initially proposed: 3 times/year)
- Allow optional task-focused subgroups

“This group won’t... be writing letters of support... It’s not meant to dictate what any organization does, but meant as a mechanism to catalyze collaboration.”

Participants generally supported the charter, with suggestions to:

- Increase meeting frequency (every 2 months instead of quarterly)
- Add **GIS mapping** as an explicit primary goal
- Create subgroups for technical topics

4. Central Discussion: GIS Mapping & Operational Data Integration

4.1. Why Mapping Became the Top Priority

Multiple participants described past incidents where **lack of accessible, accurate fuel break maps** hindered fire response. Examples included:

- Pine Acres fuel break (2015 Butte Fire)
- Electric Fire (2022)
- Sly Park (CAL FIRE incident where crews nearly fired off in the wrong location)

“If we could have given him... a map where he could pull it up in the middle of the night and see... this ridge is good, accessible... all this stuff... that’s where we need to get.”

4.2. Challenges Identified

- No county GIS specialist
- Past mapping efforts died when funding ended
- Need for consistent data standards across agencies
- Need for secure layers (e.g., water/telecom infrastructure)
- Need for maintenance schedules and treatment status
- Need for integration with state systems (Interagency Task Force, CalMapper)

4.3. Proposed Solutions

- Form a **Mapping Task Group** immediately
- Evaluate existing regional map hubs (Tuolumne, Calaveras, LEAP)
- Identify long-term “home” for the data (RCD? CAL FIRE? County?)
- Consider hiring a consultant if staffing is unavailable
- Build a multi-layer system including:
 - Fuel breaks
 - Treatment history & maintenance status

- Home hardening & defensible space progress
- Infrastructure overlays (restricted access)
- Ingress/egress routes
- Watershed protection zones

4.4. Decision

Mapping Task Group established as the first official task group. Next full meeting will be a **deep dive on mapping.**

5. Grants, Project Coordination, and Funding Needs

Participants discussed active and upcoming grants, emphasizing the need to avoid duplicative applications and strengthen multi-partner proposals.

5.1. Active Projects Highlighted

RCD / Fire Safe Council:

- Tiger Creek → Hwy 26 → Pine Acres shaded fuel break expansion
- Lake Camanche → Hwy 49 corridor
- Shake Ridge → Dry Creek → Charleston corridor
- Defensible space funding (second round)
- Prescribed fire & grazing expansion with El Dorado PBA

BLM, SPI, and private landowners expressed interest in coordinated treatment zones and timber removal where appropriate.

5.2. Proposed Coordination Tools

- A **Google Group / listserv** for grant announcements
- Shared letters of support
- Early notification when organizations plan to apply for the same grant
- Multi-agency applications for higher competitiveness

6. Insurance, Risk Reduction, and Regulatory Alignment

Supervisor Epperson and others raised concerns about:

- Fair Plan costs

- High-risk designations
- Lack of alignment between state maps and actual local mitigation work

Amanda and Jeff Hoag discussed the **Fire Risk Reduction Community (FRRRC) List**, which Amador County is not yet on.

“I looked it up this morning... Amador is not [on the list].”

The group agreed to:

- Explore FRRRC eligibility
- Gather required documentation
- Coordinate with county planning, fire agencies, and CAL FIRE
- Use mapping improvements to support future insurance discussions

7. Decisions, Next Steps, and Meeting Cadence

7.1. Key Decisions

- **Adopt the collaboration charter** (with minor edits)
- **Establish Mapping Task Group** immediately
- **Next full meeting scheduled for August 12, 2026**
- Meeting cadence: **every 2 months**, not quarterly
- RCD/Fire Safe Council will send letters of support for active grants
- Participants encouraged to share grant plans via new communication channel (to be created)

7.2. Immediate Action Items

1. Mapping Task Group formation

- Identify existing data sources
- Evaluate Tuolumne/Calaveras map hubs
- Determine long-term data home
- Identify funding pathways
- Prepare materials for August 12 meeting

2. Grant coordination

- RCD to circulate letters of support
- Participants to share grant intentions

3. FRRC List exploration

- Jeff Hoag to provide guidance
- County departments to gather required documentation

4. CWPP implementation tracking

- Begin identifying metrics for annual review

8. Closing Remarks

Amanda closed by expressing appreciation for the strong turnout and alignment:

“I’m very proud of my team... Good job.”

The meeting adjourned with clear momentum, shared priorities, and a commitment to reconvene on **August 12, 2026** for a focused session on GIS mapping and operational readiness.