

TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Title: Discussion of Summer Wildfire Mitigation Work and New CalFire Hazard Severity Zones Map

Meeting Date: April 16, 2025

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RECOMMENDATION:

This is an informational item only.

BACKGROUND:

The Town of Mammoth Lakes (TOML), along with our partners at the Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District (MLFPD), Whitebark Institute (Whitebark), Inyo National Forest (Inyo), and others are working collaboratively to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in and around Mammoth Lakes.

As such, timber management work, mowing, and mastication will be occurring in and around Mammoth Lakes over the next several summers. While we desire to focus on Summer 2025, we do want to paint a larger picture of work occurring moving into future years. Chance Traub, Forest Fire Management Officer with the Inyo, will provide an overview of upcoming projects and help paint a picture of mitigation work, future efforts, funding, challenges, and other pertinent information. The Outdoor Recreation Manager and MLFPD staff will also provide an update of work occurring on non-federal parcels.

Following this discussion will be an examination of the recently released California Fire Severity Hazard Zones Map. The State Fire Marshal is mandated to classify lands within State Responsibility Areas into Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ). Fire Hazard Severity Zones fall into one of the following classifications:

- Moderate
- High
- Very High

California laws that require Fire Hazard Severity Zones include California Public Resources Code 4201-4204, California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 1280 and California Government Code 51175-89.

The Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps are developed using a science-based and field-tested model that assigns a hazard score based on the factors that influence fire likelihood and fire behavior. Many factors are considered such as fire history, existing and potential fuel (natural vegetation), predicted flame length, blowing embers, terrain, and

typical fire weather for the area. There are three levels of hazard in the State Responsibility Areas: moderate, high, and very high.

Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps evaluate “hazard,” not “risk”. They are like flood zone maps, where lands are described in terms of the probability level of a particular area being inundated by floodwaters, and not specifically prescriptive of impacts. “Hazard” is based on the physical conditions that create a likelihood and expected fire behavior over a 30 to 50-year period without considering mitigation measures such as home hardening, recent wildfire, or fuel reduction efforts. “Risk” is the potential damage a fire can do to the area under existing conditions, accounting for any modifications such as fuel reduction projects, defensible space, and ignition resistant building construction.

Mammoth Fire Protection District staff will discuss specifics related to this map and what it means for the Town of Mammoth Lakes along with next steps.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

At this time, implementation work will be performed through existing budgets of MLFPD and TOML. Grants will be sought on a consistent basis to further support programming. Related to the FHSZ Map, a brief conversation of impacts (if any) to insurance will be discussed.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

All areas proposed for fire mitigation work are either part of the ESCCRP or are contained within the area surveyed for the SHARP project. Inyo staff will inform TOML & MLFPD regarding NEPA considerations as this project moves toward implementation.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Town and MLFPD staff continue to work with Inyo National Forest personnel on the appropriate mechanisms needed to authorize wildfire prevention work. Council will be kept informed regarding those efforts.