

Mammoth Lakes Town Council

Agenda Action Sheet

Title: Consideration of the Ordinance adopting the State Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

Council Meeting Date: 6/18/2025

Prepared by: Nolan Bobroff, Community and Economic Development Director; Ales Tomaier, Fire Chief, Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District

Recommended Motion: Waive the first reading and introduce by title only an ordinance adopting the State Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for the Town of Mammoth Lakes and finding that the ordinance is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines §15378 because the activity is not considered to be a project.

Summary: As a result of deadly and destructive wildfires in California, the State has mandated the identification of fire hazard severity zones (FHSZ) on both State and locally managed lands since the early 1990s. While initially the identification of these zones was centered around “Very High Fire Severity Zones”, more recent catastrophic fires have resulted in additional regulations including the addition of both “moderate” and “high” zones that the State Fire Marshall is required to recommend to local jurisdictions for adoption. Additional regulations associated with these zones include materials and construction methods for exterior wildfire exposure in new construction, natural hazard real estate disclosures, 100-foot defensible space requirements, property development standards, and consideration during future general plan developments.

The first mapping of FHSZ’s within the Local Responsibility Areas was completed in 2007. The hazard maps have now been significantly updated to more accurately reflect the zones in California that are susceptible to wildfire. The new mapping process incorporated new science in local climate data and improved assessment modeling in determining hazard ratings.

The Town has several requirements related to these zones including making the State’s zone recommendations available to the public for review and input within 30 days of receiving the recommended map, adopting the new map by way of ordinance within 120 days of receiving the updated map, and transmitting the ordinance and adopted map to the State Board of Forestry within 30 days of adoption. The Town has met the 30-day public accessibility and input requirement and must adopt the updated zones by ordinance by July 22, 2025 to meet the 120-day adoption requirement timeline.

While the Town does have the ability to increase the severity of the recommended zones, we are unable to reduce the severity. After reviewing the zones, staff does not recommend altering the CAL FIRE recommended zones. The FHSZ maps are intended to drive local planning decisions, not insurance decisions, and historically have not affected insurance offerings. FHSZ maps do not assess wildfire safety actions such as community mitigation or home hardening that may reduce wildfire risk for individual properties. Additionally, insurance companies have access to alternate risk analysis tools and models that go beyond the proposed FHSZ maps. Generally, the FHSZ designations have been used to establish building code requirements (e.g., WUI Standards) for properties in the Very High zones; however, the Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District (MLFPD) previously adopted and require all structures to be built to the WUI standards regardless

of the FHSZ designation, and therefore the updated map designations will not have an impact on the building code standards here in Mammoth.

Changes to the FHSZ Maps: The number of acres identified as a “Very High Fire Severity Zone” increased by approximately 625% from 296 acres in the 2007 map [*largely the Bluffs and a small portion of Old Mammoth*] to 2,147 acres in the 2025 map [*covers the majority of the Town*]. Additionally, 854 acres have been identified as a “High Fire Severity Zone” and 98 acres as a “Moderate Fire Severity Zone”.

CEQA Compliance: The proposed ordinance amendment is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section §15378(b)(5) as it is an organizational or administrative activity of government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Attachments

1. Draft Ordinance adopting the State recommended 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map for the Town of Mammoth Lakes
2. Calfire FHSZ Map Frequently Asked Questions, dated December 18, 2024