

Mendocino County C.E.O. Report

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Beneficial Burning and Tribal Land Stewardship Advisor

In October 2024, the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) initiated the new Beneficial Burning and Tribal Land Stewardship program for Mendocino and Lake counties. UCCE will be partnering with Tribes, Tribally-led organizations, agencies, and private landowners to support capacity building within Tribal communities for planning and conducting land stewardship activities. UCCE also aims to help facilitate networking and outreach events focused on fire ecology, cultural resource management, climate change adaptation, and community wildfire resilience. This program aims to be indigenous-led and will be adapted to the priorities and needs of each individual Tribe in the needs assessment this coming year. During the spring through the summer of 2025, UCCE will continue to conduct informal interviews, listening sessions, and meet with Tribal leaders to discuss Tribal needs related to getting good fire back on the ground, home hardening, and potential research opportunities supporting the revitalization of plant species for continuation of cultural practices, lifeways, and well-being.

UCCE will also help support Tribes in the regulatory permitting process (CEQA, NEPA etc.) and identify other barriers to burning on Tribal trust lands. UCCE is currently working with the Pinoleville Pomo Nation and the Mendocino Resource Conservation District (RCD) on a CALFIRE Forest Health Grant and California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) on the Leonard Lake Reserve and Montgomery Woods State Park working on a variety of fuel treatments and oak woodland restoration through the use and implementation of cultural burning practices on 2,100 acres for the next four years.

UCCE is also working on supporting fire science education and curriculum led by the Mendocino Fire Safe Council and the Hopland Research and Extension Center for a total of 16 different K-8 schools and reaching over 800 students in Mendocino County. UCCE will also assist in the steering committee of the Mendocino Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) which supports private landowners in conducting prescribed burns on their properties. As part of the steering committee, UCCE aims to connect private landowners interested in conducting burns in partnership with the surrounding Tribes or Tribally-led organizations on ancestral territory.

This program will continue to build through the next year and will aim to improve fire resiliency, forest ecosystems, and the overall health and well-being of Tribal and community members in Mendocino and Lake counties.