

For Immediate Release

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REGIONAL FIRE SAFE COUNCILS COLLABORATE ON HIGHWAY 35 (SKYLINE BLVD.) EVACUATION ROUTE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

FIRE SAFE San Mateo County Grant Funding Enables Complete Critical Evacuation Route Hardening Covering San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Project Was Top Priority In Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP).

February 3, 2025, San Mateo and Saratoga, CA—FIRE SAFE San Mateo County, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, and South Skyline Fire Safe Council announced today the completion of a major disaster and wildfire evacuation route project traversing San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. The Highway 35 project, locally known as Skyline Boulevard, is a major thoroughfare contained within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

The project has been recognized as a critical improvement area to enhance the ability of residents, fire service agencies and emergency responders to evacuate and stage emergency equipment in the event of a disaster such as an earthquake or wildfire. The project was made possible by a \$2,600,000 CAL FIRE Wildfire Prevention Grant that FIRE SAFE San Mateo was awarded in 2022. Initially, it was planned and funded for San Mateo County's section of Highway 35, from Highway 92 on the Eastern-most area, to Page Mill Road on San Mateo County's Western-most piece of the project. Led by Denise Enea, Executive Director of FIRE SAFE San Mateo County, who completed their initial 25-mile project area with efficiency, grant funds remained, and Denise contacted Santa Clara FireSafe Council CEO, Seth Schalet, regarding joint collaboration from Page Mill Road until the grant funding was expended. Santa Clara County FireSafe Council and Skyline Fire Safe Council

have both done extensive project work along their boundaries, with CEQA previously secured. This facilitated the ability to bring the evacuation route hardening down as far as Black Road in Santa Clara County.

According to Denise Enea, Executive Director of Fire Safe San Mateo County. "The Highway 35 Evacuation Safety Project was an important fuels reduction project I deemed a priority when serving as the Woodside Fire Protection District's Fire Marshal. Fire Safe San Mateo County submitted the application with the support of Cal Trans and the intent that Woodside Fire Protection District's hand crews would play a major role in conducting the fuels work. The project has been a three-year choreographed dance of Biologists, traffic control, various types of contractors and equipment including masticators, tree crews and hand crews. Traffic control is a big concern when you're working on the Highway and requires a large percentage of the budget. To be efficient and to accomplish a project this size, many weeks we had 15-20 individuals working per day along with bucket trucks, chippers, and masticators. This project also included a year and a half of critical regrowth maintenance and a large coyote brush mastication fuel break in the Midpeninsula Open Space Windy Hill Preserve adjacent to Highway 35. The ongoing support of Cal Fire's CZU Unit Division Chief, Rich Sampson and Forester Sarah Collamer has been integral in not only receiving this grant but its overall success."

"All three Fire Safe Councils have a long history of collaboration on many wildfire safety projects, especially those that traverse Highway 35, said Seth Schalet, CEO of the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council. "Denise and I work closely on a number of initiatives, and while I represent the Fire Safe Council in Santa Clara County, I am a San Mateo resident and understand how essential this route is in the event of a wildfire or any disaster evacuation. The portion of Highway 35 within Santa Clara County has been a safety priority for the City of Palo Alto and our county government agencies. I want to highlight the work that Amanda Brenner Cannon and Jim Young did to collaborate with the other Fire Safe Councils to ensure the project progressed smoothly. With funding fully provided through the CAL FIRE Fire Prevent Grant to FIRE SAFE San Mateo enabled our ability to execute this project in advance of critical fire weather in 2025 is something we are all grateful for."

"The fuel reduction work being done by FIRE SAFE San Mateo County all along Highway 35 is outstanding. Skyline Blvd is a natural fire break along the ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountains and for most of the residents within our boundaries it is their primary escape route. This project improves the safety of our community on both of those fronts, stated John DeLong, Treasurer, South Skyline FireSafe Council."

Tami Jasso, Fire Marshal, Palo Alto Fire Department added" We are most grateful to Denise and FIRE SAFE San Mateo County for graciously offering to include our jurisdiction as part of this project, at no cost to us. It will greatly benefit all those in our jurisdiction. We have an excellent partnership with Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, as they support our wildfire risk reduction programs and thank them for their engagement."

Project Highlights:

- CEQA NOE approved by Cal Fire on 2/2023
- Fuels work area included 25 original project miles in San Mateo County and 8 extended miles in Santa Clara County of Highway 35 along the Cal Trans right of way. Adjacent areas within the Windy Hill Preserve were also included.
- Removal of over 125 dead trees, trimming tree branches overhanging the roadway, removing ladder fuels, removing nonnatives, thinning and reducing spacing of sapling and mature native vegetation.
- Maintenance for undesirable regrowth conducted for a year after initial fuels treatment.
- Equipment and personnel utilized included foresters, biologists, masticators, bucket trucks, chippers, tree and hand crews with chain saws.

Project Video Link:

<https://youtu.be/rwQYnWOA8Fc>

Photo:



About Santa Clara County FireSafe Council:

As a 501(c)3 non-profit with a 20-year history, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council's core mission is to mobilize the people of Santa Clara County to protect their homes, communities, and environment from wildfires. As a trusted partner across the government, fire service, corporate and WUI residential communities, SCCFSC has led some of the most complex hazardous fuel reduction projects in the region. With a board and advisory council that has a deep expertise across the wildfire ecosystem including wildfire and environmental research, academia, emergency management, regional planning, technology products and wildland firefighting leadership, Santa Clara County FireSafe Council is uniquely positioned to lead cross-sector collaborations, government-private partnerships in Silicon Valley, Santa Clara County and beyond. For more information, visit www.sccfiresafe.org

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