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FoNA Fire Plan Position Paper Executive Summary July 2006

The Federation of Neighborhood Associations (FoNA) appreciates the Fire Committee for its work to develop a Fire Plan for Nevada County. FoNA also lauds the committee for engaging the public in shaping this important program. Community safety, based on strategic fuels reduction, is basic to dealing with the threat of catastrophic wildfires.

FoNA has analyzed the Nevada County Fire Plan and make the following recommendations. They are intended to increase the effectiveness of the plan and implement it in steps to enhance the chances for success. In general the recommendations are guided by the priorities that guide the fire districts in responding to fires. Those priorities are:

- Protect people
- Protect structures
- Protect natural resources

Recommended is the implementation of the proposed Fire Plan, in steps, involving residents as stewards of their lands. Fuel reduction is a mammoth undertaking and attempting to implement the entire Fire Plan, as currently proposed, would be problematic for a number of reasons:

- 1) The current plan does not have a comprehensive evacuation plan to safely get residents out of danger while bringing equipment and personnel into the fire area.
- 2) The plan does not identify the funding and organizational structure needed to effectively inspect and review the required 4290 Defensible Space requirements, let alone the additional fuel reduction called for on 78,000 acres on community spaces.
- 3) The Fire Plan uses a, "one size fits all" approach regardless of hazard classification, geography, grassland or forest. The Fire Plan ignores federal Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) requirements assessing neighborhood conditions of slope, aspect, water, population, roads, evacuation

routes, fuel breaks and fire fighting response time. A CWPP prioritizes interventions and funding.

- 4) The community Fire Plan burden falls solely on small property owners and proposes random fuel modification on 23% of the landmass. The plan places the majority of the cost on small property owner of 10 acres or less and has unspecified enforcement procedures.
- 5) It will take time to develop and deliver the educational programs necessary to educate citizens on the benefits and procedures for keeping their parcels and neighborhoods fire safe.
- 6) The infrastructure required, including commercial and publicly funded chipping programs will need time to develop to address fuel reduction in a manner that is effective and sustainable. Maintenance (brush clearing) of the treated areas needs to be addressed to avoid a greater hazard than existed in the beginning.
- 7) Time is needed to develop a strategic plan to complement the 4290 Defensible Space program. This would include community protection fire breaks, which are not included in the current version of the Fire Plan.

The recommended steps are:

Step 1 Develop a clear program to safely evacuate people during fire incidents. This step would include fuel reduction by the county and parcel owners along primary transportation routes. This part of the plan could include identification of staging areas strategically located to support evacuation operations and positioning equipment for effective fire fighting.

Step 2 Implement the 4290 Defensible Space requirements around structures. This step would include public education programs called for in the plan and development of stable funding sources and the organizational structure required.

Step 3 Put the mandatory community fuel reduction requirements in Appendix C of the plan on hold. While Steps 1 and 2 are being implemented the responsible agencies and citizens, would develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP's). This will allow time for private, neighborhood, and public sectors to develop all the organization, coordination, and funding necessary to effectively protect the county and identify large scale fuel reduction if necessary.

Phasing our approach to implementing a Nevada County Fire Plan will provide a higher level of success through public support, development of an effective fire-safety infrastructure, and a strategic plan that recognizes the unique challenges of our foothill regions.