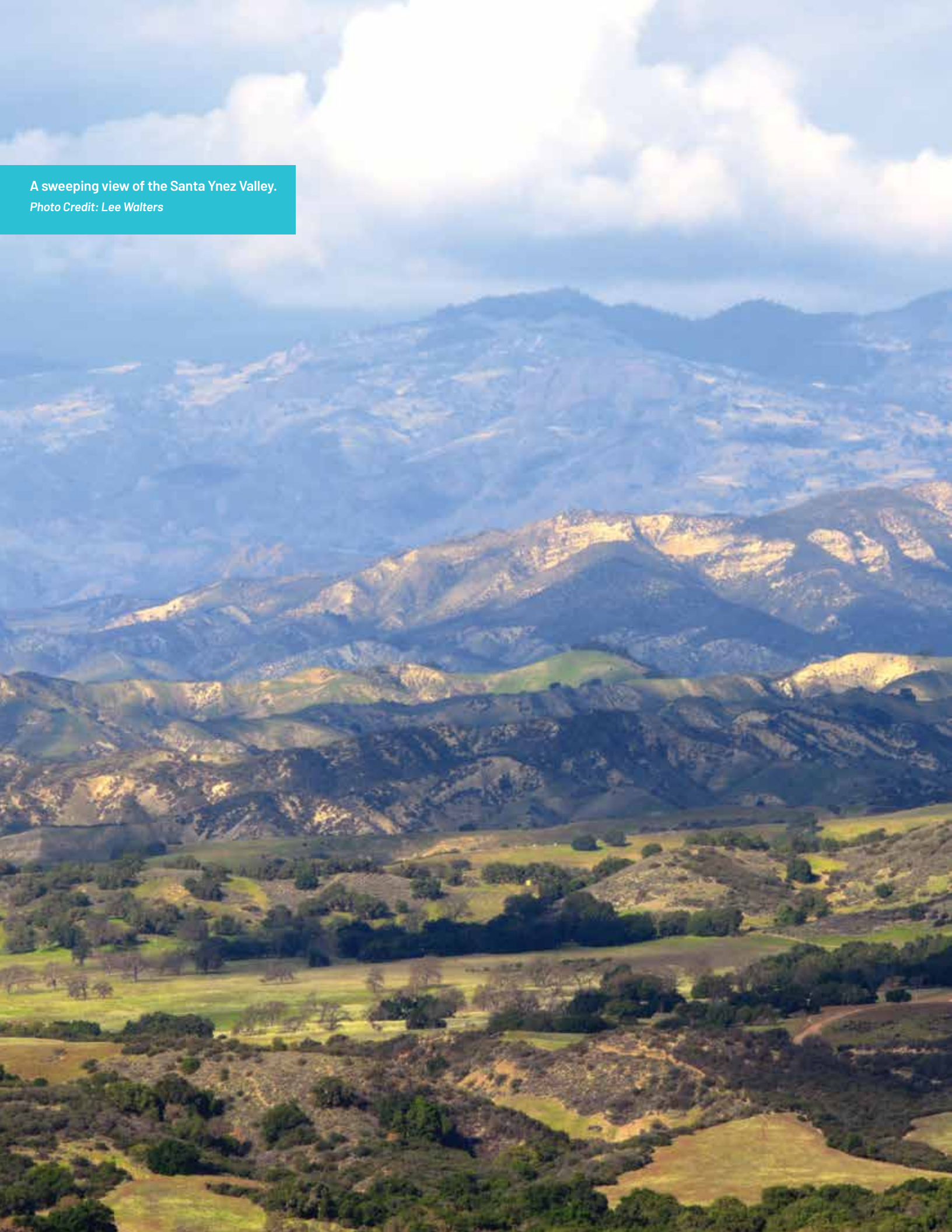


Achieving Climate Resilience on the California Central Coast

A 2022 COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN
FOR SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

A sweeping view of the Santa Ynez Valley.
Photo Credit: Lee Walters





About the Community Environmental Council

OUR MISSION: The Community Environmental Council (CEC) builds on-the-ground momentum to reverse the threat of the climate crisis. We transform the systems that fuel it. We safeguard the community from its impacts. We lead, we partner, we act. And every day, we move people to create a more resilient California Central Coast.

Recognized as a 2020 California Nonprofit of the Year and a 2020 City of Santa Barbara Climate Hero, CEC has worked since 1970 to incubate and innovate real life environmental solutions that directly affect the California Central Coast. Our current work advances rapid and equitable solutions to the climate crisis – including ambitious zero carbon goals, drawdown of excess carbon, and protection against the impacts of climate change. Our programs lead to clean vehicles, solar energy, resilient food systems, and reduction of single-use plastic.

Learn more about why CEC is one of only a handful of Santa Barbara County nonprofits to have the highest possible ratings on independent watchdogs Charity Navigator and Guidestar at [CECSB.org/impact](https://cecsb.org/impact), and find CEC on the web at [CECSB.org](https://cecsb.org).



Acknowledgements

NO ONE AGENCY OR ORGANIZATION CAN DO ALL THE WORK NECESSARY TO PROTECT AGAINST CLIMATE THREATS. Building community resilience requires strong collaboration across all sectors and disciplines. We are grateful to the diverse thought leaders and partners who are helping shape an equitable, just vision for community resilience. The actions lifted up in this report reflect some, not all, of the great work being done to move key resilience projects forward.

We would foremost like to acknowledge the First People of the area, the Chumash People, as well as the many Indigenous Peoples who currently live in Santa Barbara County, who have tended to our regional lands and helped strengthen local resilience for more than 10,000 years. We thank the Chumash community for their ongoing stewardship, storytelling, and advocacy.

We'd also like to thank CEC's Director of Climate Resilience, Sharyn Main, who authored this report and spearheaded CEC's Climate Resilience Roundtable series. We are grateful to those who came together for the Roundtables and laid the groundwork for building community solutions to climate threats in Santa Barbara County. This includes the series' funders: the Santa Barbara Foundation, the County of Santa Barbara, the California Coastal Conservancy, the James S. Bower Foundation, and the Sea Forward Fund.

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Stakeholders gather to share ideas and build community solutions at CEC's Wildfire & Smoke Climate Resilience Roundtable.
Photo Credit: Sarita Relis

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WHY DOES CLIMATE RESILIENCE MATTER?

As we work to reverse the climate crisis by reducing emissions and repairing damage to the planet, we must simultaneously seek to protect our communities from climate impacts already underway. This is climate resilience: **the ability to respond, recover, adapt, and thrive** in the face of climate change-related disruptions and disasters. In short, it means we ensure that everyone in our community is safe, regardless of economic status, race, or social standing.

To build true community-wide resilience, we must take a comprehensive, collaborative approach. We must engage organizations, leaders, and community members across all social and environmental sectors, empowering every group and individual to take part in developing equitable solutions.



Russell Chamberlin of Chamberlin Ranch discusses how carbon farming practices have helped build soil health on the ranch.

Photo Credit: Sarita Relis

WHAT IS THIS ACTION PLAN?

Achieving Climate Resilience on the California Central Coast is part of an ongoing effort by CEC to identify the most immediate climate threats to this region and prioritize actions that reduce these risks. The plan focuses on Santa Barbara County and evaluates the most pressing climate needs and opportunities, drawing on extensive input from diverse community and government partners and the latest climate science. Future iterations of this plan will expand to cover the entire Central Coast region.

Most importantly, this action plan reflects what the community is experiencing and calling for at this moment. The priorities and related actions lifted up in this report are based largely on what we heard during multiple community listening and idea gathering processes between 2019 and 2021. These sessions provided key insights from residents, workers, public safety agencies, the agriculture sector, and community-based organizations.

Ultimately, *Achieving Climate Resilience on the California Central Coast* demonstrates how collaborative, community-generated solutions can move from ideas to implementation.

When selecting priorities, CEC elevates solutions that are

- 1. Community led – based on what the community is experiencing and calling for;**
- 2. Intersectional – supporting a broad range of community needs; and**
- 3. Ready to activate – with some type of momentum behind them already.**

Because climate change impacts are dynamic and influenced by public health or social challenges, this report is meant to serve as a jumping off point. Wildfire escalated to a top priority for 2022, but water supply may become a higher priority soon if the drought persists.

WHO IS THIS ACTION PLAN FOR?

This action plan is for all community members engaged in climate action or seeking ways to partner on solutions, including climate justice activists, government officials and staff, nonprofit organizations, and community groups. It is also for farmers and food producers, emergency responders, healthcare workers, and other professionals who feel the impacts of climate change and want to be part of the movement toward climate-smart practices that benefit their bottom line and the community.

2022 Priority Actions for Equitable Resilience

To the right are the top five areas where we must take action to move our region toward resilience. For each area, we list specific actions that are either underway or ready to activate now.

These actions rose to the top because they are community led, intersectional, and ready to activate.



CEC's Sea Level Rise & Flooding Community Resilience Roundtable hosted small table workshops to explore current and potential impacts of flooding and sea level rise on vulnerable populations, natural ecosystems, the economy, and infrastructure.

Photo Credit: Joe Mahany

PRIORITIES	Wildfire Resilience	Heat and Smoke Protection	Agriculture and Food	Climate Justice and Equity	Capacity and Collaboration
	Reduce wildfire risks and prepare communities to adapt in a wildfire-prone region	Protect public health and prepare for extreme heat and wildfire smoke	Promote climate-resilient agriculture and ensure access to healthy local food	Center equity in climate planning and lift up a new equitable resilience vision	Build capacity and strong partnerships to take on climate challenges
ACTIONS					
Establish neighborhood climate resilience centers	✓	✓		✓	
Establish equity action plans in high-risk fire areas	✓			✓	
Use Indigenous cultural burn practices to support fire management	✓			✓	
Expand wildfire smoke alert systems		✓		✓	
Design cooling action plans to protect outdoor workers and vulnerable populations from extreme heat		✓		✓	
Expand healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture demonstration projects			✓		
Advocate for local policies that encourage climate-smart agriculture			✓		
Rescue excess food			✓	✓	
Steward inclusive local and regional resilience planning				✓	✓
Create a climate justice policy platform				✓	
Initiate a collaborative resource team for backbone support and project co-creation	✓			✓	✓

PRIORITY: Wildfire Resilience

Reduce wildfire risks and prepare communities to adapt in a wildfire-prone region

THE PROBLEM:

Reducing wildfire risks has always been a high priority for the fire-prone Central Coast. There is a lot of emphasis on protecting the wildland/urban interface (WUI) areas where homes are at significant risk from fire originating in forests and wildland areas. However, climate-driven conditions have elevated fire risks well beyond the wildlands and into neighborhoods and downtown areas.

Multiple organizations and agencies are working on fire resilience and readiness in the region, yet gaps still exist in how we respond to and safeguard the community against the threat of wildfires and smoke:

- **Urban neighborhoods often lack adequate information about and preparation for fast moving wildland fires**
- **There are not enough places for people to retreat to during disasters and extreme weather events**
- **Uncoordinated efforts cost livelihoods and resources while risking lives**
- **Non-inclusive planning practices don't take advantage of the broad range of resources, wisdom, and solutions the community has to offer**
- **Equity is not always a top-line priority in action planning, communication, and distribution of resources**

To address these gaps, agencies, organizations, and stakeholders must coordinate efforts so that resources and actions are equitably leveraged for the greatest community benefit. This requires collaborative and inclusive processes that engage, elevate, and empower diverse voices in prioritizing solutions.

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPACTFUL THING WE CAN DO NOW?

- Establish neighborhood climate resilience centers
- Establish equity action plans in high-risk fire areas
- Use Indigenous cultural burn practices to support fire management
- Initiate a collaborative resource team for backbone support and project co-creation

A Santa Barbara County firefighter hoses down a hillside after a wildfire.

Photo Credit: Mike Eliason, Santa Barbara County Fire



PRIORITY: Heat and Smoke Protection

Protect public health and prepare for extreme heat and wildfire smoke

THE PROBLEM:

Extreme heat and smoke from wildfires pose significant threats to public health and well-being.

Heat is the leading cause of weather-related death in the United States. It disproportionately impacts low-income communities and people of color who often lack air conditioning, home insulation, or easily accessible green spaces.

Wildfire smoke contains hazardous airborne particles, gases, and compounds including carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons, and nitrogen oxides. Smoke doesn't need to be from a local fire to be dangerous – smoke from wildfires in other parts of the state can impact the region for days and weeks.

Individuals at greatest risk are:

- **Unsheltered**
- **Chronically ill or have underlying health conditions**
- **Pregnant**
- **Outdoor workers**
- **Very young (< 5 years old)**
- **Very old (> 65 years old)**
- **Not knowledgeable about the health risks of extreme heat and wildfire smoke**
- **Not prepared to protect themselves against extreme heat and wildfire smoke**

Preparing for extreme heat and wildfire smoke is a recognized gap in resilience planning at the local, state, and federal levels. Immediate and coordinated actions across counties and regions are needed to ensure communities are aware of the dangers and have the tools necessary to protect themselves from the next extreme heat wave or wildfire.

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPACTFUL THING WE CAN DO NOW?

- **Establish neighborhood climate resilience centers**
- **Expand wildfire smoke alert systems**
- **Design cooling action plans to protect outdoor workers and vulnerable populations from extreme heat**



A Santa Barbara County wildfire encroaches on a residence.

Photo Credit: Mike Eliason, Santa Barbara County Fire

PRIORITY: Agriculture and Food

Promote climate-resilient agriculture and ensure access to healthy local food.

THE PROBLEM:

Compounding climate threats are particularly impactful on agriculture and our entire food system.

Extended droughts, extreme heat, hot winds, and wildfire smoke and ash damage crops, reduce yields, and make food more expensive to grow.

Our community is also vulnerable to hunger – particularly students, unsheltered populations, low-wage earners, and seniors. Disruptions to the economic system caused by climate disasters and/or public health crises have the potential to push even more people toward food insecurity.

Building a sustainable, fair, and healthy food system requires a “whole community approach” that works at the intersection of climate change, health, equity, and the environment. This includes ensuring basic human needs are met and that access to housing, food, and jobs are top priorities for strengthening community resilience.

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPACTFUL THING WE CAN DO NOW?

- **Expand healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture demonstration projects**
- **Advocate for local policies that encourage climate-smart agriculture**
- **Rescue excess food**



Implementing climate-smart agriculture practices is one way to capture carbon from the atmosphere and build healthy soil.

Photo Credit: Sarita Relis

PRIORITY: Climate Justice and Equity

Center equity in climate planning and lift up a new equitable resilience vision

THE PROBLEM:

Climate adaptation has largely been driven by crisis and response, which can be inherently unfair to under-resourced communities and marginalized populations. Those who lack the capacity, resources, and know-how to maneuver the response systems or rally government support often have a harder time recovering after a crisis. They also have a greater chance of being permanently harmed or displaced. While it is widely recognized that climate change disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations and there is growing support for equitable solutions, we still lack effective ways to incorporate equity into the climate planning process.

To ensure a climate-resilient future for everyone, we must quickly prepare communities for the next disaster, particularly those at greatest risk or most socially and economically vulnerable. We must simultaneously build collaborative capacity of individuals, neighborhoods, communities, and community-based organizations to set priorities and implement actions that are in their best interest.

This type of planning requires a community-driven approach that brings all stakeholders – government agencies, community-based organizations, grassroots groups, and advocates – to the table.

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPACTFUL THING WE CAN DO NOW?

- **Establish neighborhood climate resilience centers**
- **Establish equity action plans in high-risk fire areas**
- **Use Indigenous cultural burn practices to support fire management**
- **Expand wildfire smoke alert systems**
- **Design cooling action plans to protect outdoor workers and vulnerable populations from extreme heat**
- **Rescue excess food**
- **Steward inclusive local and regional resilience planning**
- **Create a climate justice policy platform**
- **Initiate a collaborative resource team for backbone support and project co-creation**

PRIORITY: Capacity and Collaboration

Build capacity and strong partnerships to take on climate challenges

THE PROBLEM:

Local agencies, organizations, and networks don't have the capacity needed to develop community-wide resilience measures at the scale necessary to address the climate threats and challenges we face. Developing and implementing bold collaborative climate actions will require:

- **Major investments of time and money distributed equitably across all sectors of society**
- **Empowerment of local communities**
- **Leadership from traditionally under-represented and marginalized communities to ensure there is equity and inclusion in the process**
- **Assistance, tools, and financial resources for individuals, neighborhood groups, organizations, and agencies to engage and broaden their skills**
- **Additional capacity for agencies and organizations to catalyze partnerships, further project planning, prepare compelling grant proposals, and successfully manage projects**

In order to take advantage of climate resilience grants and resources that are coming down the pipeline from state and federal agencies, we must build upfront capacity now.

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPACTFUL THING WE CAN DO NOW?

- **Steward inclusive local and regional resilience planning**
- **Initiate a collaborative resource team for backbone support and project co-creation**

Building capacity and strong partnerships to take on climate challenges requires bringing community members to the table to ensure that resilience planning is inclusive.

Photo Credit: Joe Mahany



11 Actions for 2022

- 1 Establish neighborhood climate resilience centers
- 2 Establish equity action plans in high-risk fire areas
- 3 Use Indigenous cultural burn practices to support fire management
- 4 Expand wildfire smoke alert systems
- 5 Design cooling action plans to protect outdoor workers and vulnerable populations from extreme heat
- 6 Pilot healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture demonstration projects
- 7 Advocate for local policies to encourage climate-smart agriculture
- 8 Rescue excess food
- 9 Steward inclusive local and regional resilience planning
- 10 Create a climate justice policy platform
- 11 Initiate a collaborative resource team for backbone support and project co-creation

ACTION 1

Establish neighborhood climate resilience centers

Priorities this action addresses:

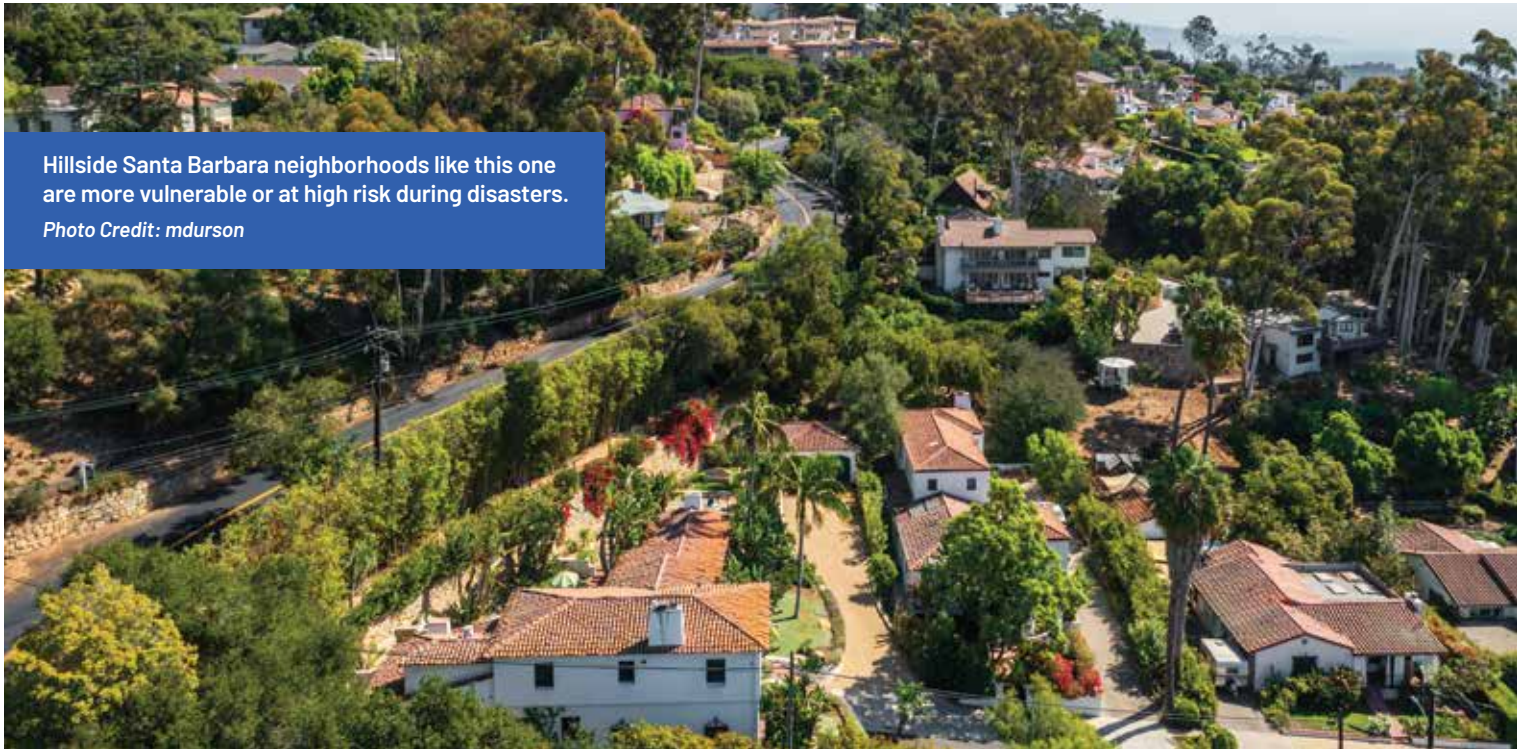
Wildfire Resilience
Heat and Smoke Protection
Climate Justice and Equity

What are climate resilience centers?

Climate resilience centers are neighborhood level “hubs” that serve residents who are most vulnerable or at high risk during disasters. These centers utilize existing and trusted locations, such as schools, community centers, churches, and government buildings.

Designed in partnership with residents, they offer support before, during, and after climate-related disruptions with services like:

- **Providing clean air during smoke events**
- **Acting as cooling locations during extreme heat**
- **Distributing food**
- **Serving as a hub for emergency services**
- **Facilitating disaster preparedness training and neighborhood organizing**
- **Hosting off-grid charging during power outages or shutdowns**



Hillside Santa Barbara neighborhoods like this one are more vulnerable or at high risk during disasters.

Photo Credit: mdurson

Why do we need them?

Climate resilience centers provide critical space to share information, create self-sustaining networks of community support, and build leadership and empowerment at the neighborhood level.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- The Santa Barbara County Regional Climate Collaborative, in partnership with CEC and Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) received a grant to begin **planning and design of a network of resilience centers**, starting with two pilot locations. Grant funds will support community-based organizations to conduct neighborhood level outreach and gather input on where resilience centers should be located and what services they should offer. CEC will lead the effort to develop a toolkit with resources and guidance on how to develop climate resilience centers in other locations with the goal of establishing a network of centers across the county.
- The **Energy Assurance Assessment Service** provides technical assistance to property owners to facilitate resilient energy adoption for buildings and community facilities that provide critical services or could serve as resilience centers. The County of Santa Barbara Sustainability Division launched this program in early 2022.

ACTION 2

Establish equity action plans in high-risk fire areas

Priorities this action addresses:

Wildfire Resilience

Climate Justice and Equity

What is an equity action plan?

An equity action plan is an on-the-ground effort that identifies the vulnerabilities of frontline and Spanish-speaking populations and incorporates actions to address their needs. It is inclusive of a spectrum of identities and lived experiences, and empowers communities to identify weaknesses, gaps, and needs in order to protect against wildfire and other climate risks. Ideally, equity actions are incorporated into existing and new resilience or public safety plans.

Why do we need it?

Equity action plans can be used to customize an outreach and implementation strategy that includes:

- **Neighborhood organizing**
- **Emergency preparedness training and planning**
- **Home fire resilience retrofits**
- **Evacuation plans**
- **Consideration of a neighborhood resilience center**

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- The **Regional Priority Plan to Reduce Wildfire Risk and Improve Forest Health in Santa Barbara County** provides a platform of actional projects identified through community outreach and input from diverse partners. These projects will reduce fire risk and benefit disadvantaged communities, including implementation of Indigenous cultural burning practices and a wildfire protection plan in Lompoc. The Cachuma Resource Conservation District, the Conservation Biology Institute, LegacyWorks Group, McGinnis Environmental, and CEC led the development of the Plan. Learn more: sbcwildfireresilience.org.

- The **Regional Wildfire Mitigation Program** brings a comprehensive wildfire resilience initiative to southern Santa Barbara County. The Spatial Informatics Group Natural Assets Laboratory (a California-based nonprofit), the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council, climate justice partners, local fire agencies, and others are leading this project. CEC will assist with equity and vulnerability assessments and outreach components as needed.

Learn more: sbfiresafecouncil.org/regional-wildfire-mitigation-program.

- **Firewise USA** provides fire resilience training for neighborhood associations to develop an action plan that guides their properties' risk reduction activities, while engaging and encouraging their neighbors to become active participants in building communities that are more adaptive to wildfire. The Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council facilitates this program.

Learn more: sbfiresafecouncil.org/firewise-usa.

- The **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program** educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. The Santa Barbara County Fire Department holds CERT classes several times a year.

Learn more: sbcfire.com/community-emergency-response-team-cert.



The Santa Barbara County Fire Department holds CERT classes several times a year to help individuals be better prepared to respond to and cope with the aftermath of a disaster.

Photo Credit: Santa Barbara County Fire

- **Listos** collaborates with community leaders, jurisdictions, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, schools, and other community institutions to provide disaster preparedness information to the Spanish-speaking community. Information is tailored to meet individual needs and formatted to be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Learn more: listos.org.

ACTION 3

Use Indigenous cultural burn practices to support fire management

Priorities this action addresses:

Wildfire Resilience

Climate Justice and Equity

What are Indigenous cultural burn practices?

For generations, the Chumash People regularly burned vegetation using low-grade fires to promote ecosystem health throughout the Central Coast region. These Indigenous cultural burn practices increased water runoff into streams, improved habitats for plants and animals, and recycled nutrients.

Why do we need them?

Since the early 1900s and until recently, traditional burnings were largely banned in California due to the state's regulations around fire management. The shift in land management strategy has prompted state and local fire agencies to seek Indigenous knowledge to reestablish these practices that help reduce fire risks and promote healthy ecosystems.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

The **Chumash Good Fire Project** is helping build collaboration between fire agencies, land managers, conservation organizations, and Chumash communities to incorporate traditional cultural burning into fire management plans. The Santa Ynez Chumash Environmental Office is leading this project in collaboration with LegacyWorks Group and CEC.





A prescribed burn at the Sedgwick Preserve in Santa Ynez.
Photo Credit: Santa Ynez Chumash Environmental Office

ACTION 4

Expand wildfire smoke alert systems

Priorities this action addresses:







Heat and Smoke Protection

Climate Justice and Equity

What are wildfire smoke alert systems?

A wildfire smoke alert system is a coordinated effort to alert individuals – by text, email, or phone – when the Air Quality Index registers in the “unhealthy” range, as defined by this chart:

Air Quality Index

Daily AQI Color	Levels of Concern	Values of Index	Description of Air Quality
	Good	0 to 50	Air quality is satisfactory. Air pollution poses little or no risk.
	Moderate	51 to 100	Air quality is acceptable. However, there may be a risk for some people, particularly those who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.
	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101 to 150	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is less likely to be affected.
	Unhealthy	151 to 200	Some members of the general public may experience health effects. Members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
	Very Unhealthy	201 to 300	Health alert: The risk of health effects is increased for everyone.
	Hazardous	301 and higher	Health warning of emergency conditions: everyone is more likely to be affected.

Why do we need them?

When the air quality is “unhealthy,” everyone is vulnerable to the negative health impacts from prolonged exposure. The California Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires employers to provide protective N95 masks for outdoor workers when air quality registers in this range. However, if the fire is distant or the sky does not appear hazy, it may not be evident that the air is polluted and precautions are needed. If individuals and employers are alerted that air quality is poor and harmful pollutants are present, they can take precautions to protect themselves and their workers.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- A **Wildfire Smoke Alert System** recently launched in Ventura County sends farmworkers and field supervisors notifications in Spanish and English when the level of pollution reaches “unhealthy” on the Air Quality Index. The Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) worked with the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District to spearhead this effort. CEC is now investigating how to bring a similar program to Santa Barbara County.

Learn more: vcapcd.org/smoke.

- The **Guadalupe Community Air Project** is developing a community-led air quality monitoring system in Guadalupe and Santa Maria where a large number of agricultural workers and their families live. CEC is leading this effort in partnership with with the Guadalupe School District, Los Amigos del Guadalupe, Blue Sky Center, and the Global Environmental Justice Project at UC Santa Barbara.



Flames from the 2009 Jesusita Fire threaten a hilltop house.

Photo Credit: Terry Straehley

ACTION 5

Design cooling action plans to protect outdoor workers and vulnerable populations from extreme heat

Priorities this action addresses:

Heat and Smoke Protection

Climate Justice and Equity

What are cooling action plans?

Cooling action plans provide a framework for how communities can respond to extreme heat events.

Suggested actions can include:

- **Installing trees and shade structures**
- **Adding reflective coatings to roofs and pavement**
- **Activating cooling centers**
- **Opening community swimming pools**
- **Installing water misters**
- **Ensuring public access to shaded parks and beaches**
- **Offering programs to help upgrade homes and buildings with insulation, energy efficient cooling systems, and window blinds and awnings**
- **Leveraging neighborhood watch programs that incorporate “heat checks” on seniors, people with chronic health conditions, and the unsheltered**
- **Ensuring outdoor workers and people regularly exposed to the elements have access to cooling options and training to recognize heat exhaustion**

Why do we need them?

In cities and developed areas where there are concentrations of dark, heat-retaining surfaces like asphalt and concrete, temperatures can be 15 to 20 degrees hotter than in surrounding areas. These “heat islands” can occur in both large and small cities. Cooling action plans can reduce air temperatures, provide immediate relief to residents during an extreme heat event, provide long-term resilience against future impacts, and save lives.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- An **Extreme Heat Framework** is under development to outline state actions to adapt and build resilience against future heat events. The State of California is leading this effort as part of an update to the Climate Adaptation Strategy.
Learn more: <https://resources.ca.gov/initiatives/building-climate-resilience/2021-state-adaptation-strategy-update>.
- Santa Barbara County’s **Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan** and **Climate Change Adaptation Plan** will be updated to identify areas that are vulnerable to known hazards or lack protective infrastructure. The County of Santa Barbara, its cities, special districts, and other agencies are collaborating on the update.
Learn more: readysbc.org/2021/03/19/2022mjhmpupdate
and sustainability.santabarbaraca.gov/carbon-neutrality.
- A **“Heat Island” Assessment** piloted in the City of Oxnard identifies areas with the most exposure, highest population sensitivity, and least ability to adapt to future extreme heat events. Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) and the Public Health Institute led the assessment, a model CEC hopes to replicate in Santa Barbara County.
- California is preparing to launch **the nation’s first heat wave ranking system and an early warning system** to help protect Californians from heat-related deaths and injuries. California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara and other delegates will formally introduce legislation to rate and name heat waves in Southern California.
Learn more: insurance.ca.gov/0400-news/0100-press-releases/2021/release109-2021.cfm.

ACTION 6

Pilot healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture demonstration projects

Priorities this action addresses:

Agriculture and Food

What are healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture demonstration projects?

Healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture demonstration projects incorporate on-the-ground soil-building practices, research, and education, and exhibit the climate resilience benefits of investing in soil health. Soil-building practices can include:

- **Applying compost or mulch**
- **Cover cropping**
- **Reducing or eliminating soil tillage and disturbance**
- **Increasing plant diversity**
- **Restoring ecological balance**

Why do we need them?

Agriculture must adapt to the climate changes already underway in order to survive in this constantly shifting environment – and be better prepared to weather the current megadrought or next fire, flood, or extreme heat event. Healthy soils and climate-smart agriculture practices can help mitigate the effects of climate change by pulling carbon out of the air and moving it into the soil where it's beneficial. By expanding climate-smart agriculture practices that build soil health, retain more moisture, and promote biodiversity, we can both reduce the impact of climate change and create stronger, more resilient agriculture in the region.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- CEC's **Scaling Up Carbon Farming: Opportunities & Barriers in Santa Barbara County** report identified several short, near-term actions to bring carbon farming into mainstream practice. The Cachuma Resource Conservation District and CEC collaborated on the report. Learn more: cec.pub/scaling-up-carbon-farming.
- **Innovative Financing Models** could increase collaborations, technical assistance, and financial resources for nature-based climate solutions. CEC, the Santa Barbara County Food Action Network, and others are exploring models being used in other areas and seeking funding to support this work.



Cattle graze – and help sequester carbon – on rangeland in the Santa Ynez Valley.
Photo Credit: spiritofamerica

ACTION 7

Advocate for local policies to encourage climate-smart agriculture

Priorities this action addresses:

Agriculture and Food

What are local policies that encourage climate-smart agriculture?

Policies that encourage climate-smart agriculture incentivize farmers, ranchers, and land stewards to invest in and implement climate-smart agriculture practices for the benefit of the individual – and the region. These policies should be informed by the people who work the land so that regulators are aware of the challenges and barriers that exist.



Vermicast (worm compost) is a climate-smart agriculture technique that repurposes food scraps to sequester carbon and build soil health.

Photo Credit: J. Andrew Hill

Why do we need them?

Existing policies and government regulations are outdated and often lag behind innovation and transformative changes happening in the field. Unless we advocate for policies that incentivize landowners to invest in climate-smart agriculture practices, we will not be able to significantly scale-up these practices to support the rapid transition in agriculture needed to help repair the climate and protect the local food system.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- A **large-scale on-farm vermicompost (worm compost) system** piloted on the Gaviota Coast showcased policy barriers to climate-smart agriculture and opportunities for regulatory alignment. The Wild Farmlands Foundation, Restoration Oaks Ranch, and CEC partnered on this project. Learn more: cecsb.org/initiatives/food/climate-safe-agriculture.
- CEC's ***Cultivating Resilience in Ventura County: Protecting Against Agricultural Vulnerabilities and Bouncing Forward After Disaster*** report identified several top recommendations – based on urgency, feasibility, and existing interest – for how the county can build agricultural resilience in the face of challenges related to water supply, labor costs, development pressures, and new land-use policies. CEC drafted the report based on interviews with individuals from over a dozen farms, ranches, and stakeholder organizations. Learn more: cecsb.org/initiatives/ventura-county-agricultural-resilience.
- **New research and demonstration projects** under development address regulatory and permitting barriers that prevent or dissuade scaling of climate-smart agriculture practices. CEC is working in partnership with landowners and operators to secure funding for this work.
- The **Santa Barbara County Food Action Network** is working with the federal government to develop policies that ensure organizations and agencies procure a percentage of food from local sources – and incentivize the federal government to negotiate community-based land leases for localized agricultural use. Learn more: sbfoodaction.org.

ACTION 8

Rescue excess food

Priorities this action addresses:

Agriculture and Food

Climate Justice and Equity

What is food rescue?

Food rescue (also called food recovery or food salvage) is the practice of gleaning edible food that would otherwise go to waste.

Why do we need it?

About 40% of food produced in the United States is never eaten. Instead, it is lost somewhere along the food chain as it is grown, processed, transported, stored, or prepared. This excess, nutritious food can be redirected from restaurants, hotels, and supermarkets to charitable organizations serving food-insecure populations. Food waste that can't be rescued or that is inedible should be converted to usable products, such as compost and renewable electricity.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- **Santa Barbara County Food Rescue** builds relationships between those with excess food and charitable organizations throughout the county to help address food insecurity and keep good food out of the landfill. CEC coordinates this effort.
Learn more: sbfoodrescue.org.
- The **City and County of Santa Barbara** are working to track food rescue in response to SB 1383, California's new law to reduce organic waste and the potent methane greenhouse gas emitted when waste decomposes in the landfill.
- **Veggie Rescue** collects excess produce from local farms, farmers markets, and backyards, distributing it directly to schools and organizations serving those in need.
Learn more: veggierescue.org.
- Foodbank of Santa Barbara County's **Backyard Bounty Program** is a volunteer-powered gleaning program, gathering leftover produce from backyards, gardens, farms, and orchards in the Santa Barbara area and redistributing it locally to those who face hunger and food insecurity.
Learn more: foodbanksbc.org/backyardbounty.



Veggie Rescue collects high quality food that would otherwise be thrown away and redirects it to organizations serving food insecure communities.

Photo Credit: J. Andrew Hill

ACTION 9

Steward inclusive local and regional resilience planning

Priorities this action addresses:

Climate Justice and Equity
Capacity and Collaboration

What is inclusive local and regional resilience planning?

Inclusive local and regional resilience planning is community-driven and includes meaningful, accessible, and culturally competent engagement of everyone early in the process.

Why do we need it?

People who have been marginalized by deeply-rooted systems of power, oppression, and inequality are more disproportionately burdened by climate change, are more sensitive to negative impacts, and have the least resources for resilience. These groups have traditionally had fewer voices in the decisions that shape our community. To ensure a climate-resilient future for everyone, we must transform the systems that are not working. It's time to accelerate and scale up equitable climate adaptation, especially for those who are most impacted and under-resourced.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- The **Central Coast Climate Justice Network** seeks to build an environmental movement that advances social, economic, and environmental justice for Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. Central Coast Alliance United for A Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), CEC, and partnering social justice, anti-racism, and environmental organizations lead the Network.
Learn more: cccjn.org.
- The **Toxic Tides** project exposes environmental health and social equity ramifications of sea level rise inundation at hazardous facilities along the California coast. Searchable maps show where flooding is likely to occur, what facilities are at risk, and how this disproportionately affects lower-income communities of color. This project was led by researchers at UC Berkeley and UC Los Angeles in collaboration with the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) and other environmental justice organizations.
Learn more: sites.google.com/berkeley.edu/toxictides.

- The **Santa Barbara County Regional Climate Collaborative** launched to identify priority areas that the region needs to focus on, plan strategies to combat climate change, and advocate for regional initiatives. The County of Santa Barbara leads the Collaborative's network of public agencies, nonprofit and for-profit groups (including CEC and community-based organizations). CEC is a member of the Equity Advisory Committee that ensures there is an equity lens in this work. Learn more: countyofsb.org/collaborative.
- The **Central Coast Climate Collaborative** serves as an organizing platform to catalyze and advance equitable climate solutions and be a conduit between state and federal agencies and local on-the-ground efforts. The Collaborative is centering justice and equity in their strategic vision to advance the work of climate and social justice organizations. Government and climate practitioners from Monterey to Ventura Counties lead the Collaborative. Learn more: centralcoastclimate.org.
- The **Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation** advances adaptation statewide and increases local capacity to build community resilience by breaking down silos across sectors and jurisdictions. Regional collaboratives and allies from across California make up the Alliance. Learn more: arccacalifornia.org.



Inclusive resilience planning is critical to ensuring accessible, multilingual spaces for community outreach and public engagement.

Photo Credit: Sarita Relis

ACTION 10

Create a climate justice policy platform

Priorities this action addresses:

Climate Justice and Equity

What is a climate justice policy platform?

A climate justice policy platform is one way to advance economic, racial, climate, and environmental justice goals to improve the well-being of all people. The platform can serve as a road map for achieving a just and equitable transition to a green economy with policy recommendations at the local, state, and national level.

Why do we need it?

We need a new community vision of resilience with a shared framework and purpose – one that is more inclusive with meaningful, accessible, and culturally competent engagement early in the planning process. This demands a whole new way of working across boundaries and hand-in-hand with communities to ensure everyone feels empowered and respected to share their knowledge, skills, and leadership to develop solutions to the climate crisis.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- A **Green New Deal** framework is under development for Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties that will help mobilize the wide-ranging social and environmental changes needed to center equity and justice in the climate movement. This policy framework will help shape a new vision for resilience where everyone is supported and has opportunities to prosper in a new, greener economy. The Central Coast Climate Justice Network leads this initiative.
Learn more: cccjn.org.
- **Towards A Just And Equitable Central Coast** is the first data-driven analysis of inequity in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties. Guided by a transformative vision of a just and equitable future, the study is intended to deepen the understanding of regional disparities, encourage conversations and support initiatives that advance social, health, environmental, and economic equity. The effort was led by the The Fund for Santa Barbara, the UC Santa Barbara Blum Center on Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy, and the University of Southern California Dornsife Equity Research Institute. CEC and other community partners serve on the advisory committee.
Learn more: fundforsantabarbara.org/regional-equity-study.

Agriculture is a major economic driver for Santa Barbara County – and can play a critical role in building solutions to the climate crisis.

Photo Credit: Elliot Lowndes



ACTION 11

Initiate a collaborative resource team for backbone support and project co-creation

Priorities this action addresses:

Wildfire Resilience

Climate Justice and Equity

Capacity and Collaboration

What is a collaborative resource team?

Building resilience and implementing regional-scale projects requires capacity to further project planning, prepare compelling grant proposals, and successfully manage projects. A collaborative resource team can provide the backbone support organizations and agencies lack and help match projects with funding opportunities.



Stakeholders gather at CEC's Sea Level Rise & Flooding Climate Resilience Roundtable to share ideas and discuss solutions.

Photo Credit: Joe Mahany

Why do we need it?

A collaborative resource team can fill key roles in building capacity, including serving as a grantee or fiscal sponsor for grants, facilitating collaborations, managing projects, and reporting on project success. The region could miss out on critical funding opportunities if a team is not in place and prepared to act when they come available.

What work is underway or ready to activate now?

- Community partners have come together to create **a collaborative resource team to develop wildfire risk reduction projects for funding** that were identified in the *Regional Priority Plan to Reduce Wildfire Risk and Improve Forest Health in Santa Barbara County*. This effort is led by the Cachuma Resource Conservation District, LegacyWorks Group, CEC, and other community organizations with funding from the California Coastal Conservancy.
Learn more: sbcwildfireresilience.org.
- The **Santa Barbara County Conservation Blueprint** provides easy to access maps, data sets, and information about natural resources and land use in Santa Barbara County. Through the Atlas portal, users can view, retrieve, and analyze information on a range of topics including land conservation, agricultural protection, resilience, and climate change or create new maps to address other topics. The Atlas is designed to make science-based spatial data from many sources easily accessible. This project is hosted by the Land Trust of Santa Barbara County.
Learn more: sbcblueprint.net. Climate and Fire Resilience maps: sbcblueprint.databasin.org.



Priorities on the Horizon

The priorities and actions outlined in this report are just the start of the extensive work that needs to be done to build climate resilience on the California Central Coast. CEC is also closely following:

EXTREME STORMS AND FLOODING

Flood warnings and evacuations can come quickly and often in the dark of night after extreme and unpredictable rain events. How can we better prepare residents and better predict post-fire debris flows?

SEA LEVEL RISE

Moving homes, businesses, and major infrastructure out of harm's way of rising seas and coastal flooding is going to be a long, complicated, and costly process. There are also serious environmental health and social justice ramifications for lower income communities of color living near hazardous waste facilities and toxic dump sites in the coastal zone. However, coastal retreat remains a contentious issue for local property owners and municipalities despite the dire predictions for sea level rise and its associated costs. If we do not start planning for retreat, we may not have a choice — or lose our beaches in an effort to save roads, buildings, and facilities.

MEGADROUGHT

Building redundancy into how we source our water supply has long been a strategy to protect against disruptions and shortfalls. However, climate threats are impacting on all fronts. Extended droughts are becoming 'megadroughts' that reduce groundwater and state water delivery. Sea level rise continues to have impacts on groundwater and desalination plant operations. It is time to consider our water priorities given the realities of dwindling water supply and prepare for moving our critical fresh water and waste water infrastructure to higher ground.

LOSS OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Protecting and enhancing natural habitats is critical to stopping biodiversity collapse and fighting against climate change. Native trees and vegetation sequester carbon dioxide and can act as buffers against fire, floods, and other disasters. However, vegetative cover is shrinking due to drought, fires, and clearing for fuel reduction. As habitats shrink, so does biodiversity. With human well-being inextricably linked to ecosystem health, how can we protect nature and ourselves?

Background

The priorities and related actions lifted up in this action plan are based largely on what we heard during multiple community listening and idea gathering processes between 2019 and 2021. These sessions provided key insights on what residents, workers, public safety agencies, the agriculture sector, and community-based organizations are experiencing and asking for.

CEC'S CLIMATE RESILIENCE ROUNDTABLES

This 18-month series identified over 700 climate resilience and adaptation solutions for the region. The roundtables focused on threats identified in the *Fourth California Climate Change Assessment*: sea level rise, heavy precipitation events, increased temperature, increased wildfire, drought, and decreased snowpack and water supply. Participants examined these threats through the lens of public and mental health, social justice, economic impacts, infrastructure vulnerabilities, natural systems, and working landscapes. In each roundtable, participants also worked to identify gaps, critical issues, and tensions in need of resolution before delving into methods for creating a collaborative vision for climate and disaster resilience.

- **Wildfire & Smoke** and **Sea Level Rise & Flooding** both explored current and potential impacts on vulnerable populations, natural ecosystems, the economy, and infrastructure.
- **Vulnerability, Health, and Equity** explored the intersection of climate-related disaster, health, and social and economic inequities that disproportionately impact our most vulnerable community members. Several frontline workers shared their personal resilience experiences.
- **Stories of Resilience from the Frontlines of Climate Change** deepened understanding of what is needed for a fair and equitable community response to ongoing climate threats. Community members on the front lines of climate and public health crises shared in their native language about lived experiences that demonstrated what resilience means and how climate impacts and socio-economic vulnerabilities combine to create even heavier burdens on our frontline and essential workers and Indigenous communities.
- **Community Solutions to Protect Against Climate Change** lifted up priority projects identified at the roundtables. These community-generated solutions will safeguard Santa Barbara County communities from the inevitable impacts of climate change and move us toward a community resilience vision that is just and equitable.

Learn more: cec.pub/resilience-roundtables.

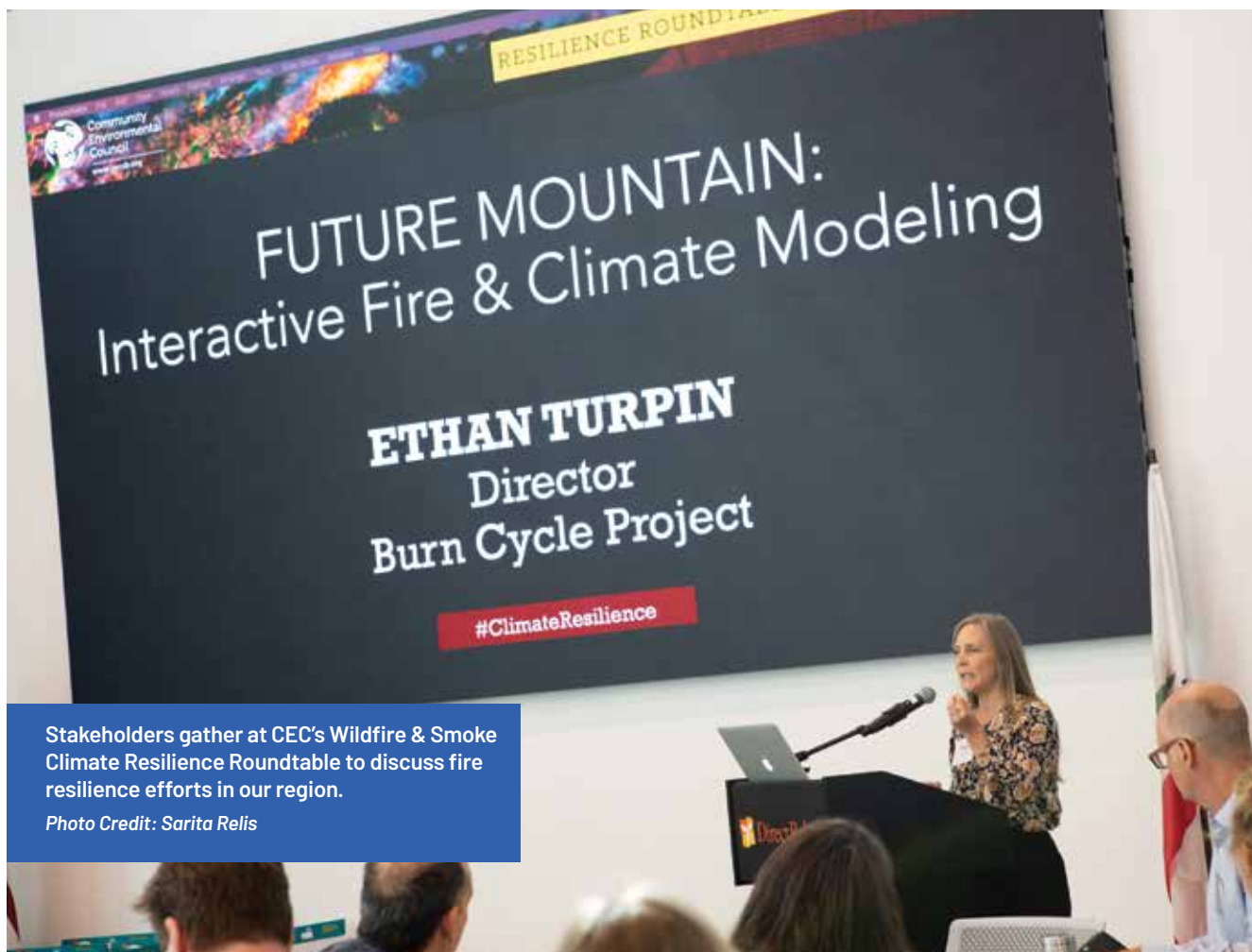
REGIONAL PRIORITY PLAN TO REDUCE WILDFIRE RISK AND IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

The *Plan* grew out of CEC's *Wildfire & Smoke Climate Resilience Roundtable*. Building upon and paralleling the roundtable series, it identified projects from the roundtables, fire agencies, environmental organizations, Indigenous communities, and others to find intersections and opportunities for collaborative action that build greater protection against wildfires in Santa Barbara County.

Learn more: sbcwildfireresilience.org.

In addition to these projects, CEC tracked regional climate resilience priorities by:

- Following and participating in numerous climate planning and vulnerability assessments conducted by the County of Santa Barbara and local cities
- Participating in local, regional, and state climate collaboratives and working groups
- Closely observing the federal and state climate budget process to know when and where to expect funding opportunities to implement projects



Stakeholders gather at CEC's Wildfire & Smoke Climate Resilience Roundtable to discuss fire resilience efforts in our region.

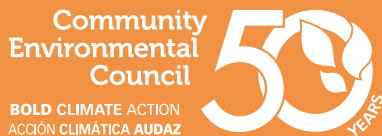
Photo Credit: Sarita Relis

Together we can build a resilient California Central Coast.

The challenges before us are great, but if we work together to transform the systems that fuel the climate crisis, we can safeguard the community from – and strengthen our region’s resilience to – its impacts.

“ Now is the time to come together in collective action to create community-driven solutions that are inclusive and equitable. This is an all-hands-on-deck effort where we need to acknowledge and assist those most impacted by climate-related hardships while engaging in policy changes on multiple fronts.”

MONA MIYASATO
CEO, COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA



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