

Monthly Message from the Chief

September 2011

Revising the CAL FIRE Strategic Plan

As we approach the middle of September, CAL FIRE continues to work through issues related to California's ongoing budget crisis. In previous Chief's Messages and through other means over the past several months, I have shared with you some of the challenges we have faced, and continue to face, during these difficult economic times. And although the Governor and Legislature have already passed the 2011-12 budget, the State continues to struggle with shifting economic outlooks that force CAL FIRE to continue to reevaluate its own budget in the face of calls for additional program cuts.



As we continue to seek solutions to difficult fiscal problems and other challenges, it is very easy to maintain a reactionary posture and not plan for the future. With these challenges, it is more important than ever that we take a proactive approach to planning and develop a clear picture of where the Department is headed. A solid strategic plan will help us to focus on the primary mission of CAL FIRE and seek ways to continue to meet that mission in the most efficient and effective manner possible, especially as our funding potentially decreases.

For that reason, I have asked the Management Council (MC) to spearhead an effort to revise and update the CAL FIRE Strategic Plan. Not to be confused with the recently released 2010 California Fire Plan, which focuses on reducing the risk of wildfire in California, the Department's Strategic Plan centers more on identifying and communicating CAL FIRE's specific strategic directions and goals. In other words, what will the Department do over the next five years to meet its mission of serving and safeguarding the people and protecting the property and resources of California?

Strategic Planning is a continuous and systematic process where people make decisions about intended future outcomes, how outcomes are to be accomplished, and how success is measured and evaluated. One of the core goals when drafting a strategic plan is to develop it in a way that is easily translatable into action plans. Most strategic plans address high level initiatives and over-arching goals, but do not get translated into day-to-day projects and tasks that will be required to achieve the plan.

In order to ensure that CAL FIRE's Strategic Plan will include the day-to-day projects and tasks, MC will be enlisting the help of the Department's Executive Team, managers and supervisors over the next several months.

The first step in this project was to define the mission statement for the Department, and MC, working with Executive Management, has already completed that step. After reviewing the current CAL FIRE mission statement, Executive Management has determined that it is still relevant and does not need to be updated.

With the mission statement defined, the next step in this project was to define the Department's high level goals to meet the mission. During August, MC held meetings with the Executive Staff to identify and define the Department's high level goals. These goals relate back to the mission statement and describe the external direction of success, ultimate achievement, and improvement in organizational performance. How will the Department serve and safeguard the people of California? Through what means?

Which leads us to the third step in this project, which is to define the objectives needed to meet each high level goal? This is where CAL FIRE's managers and supervisors will play a critical role. Through surveys and other outreach efforts culminating in a meeting to be held at the CAL FIRE Academy in December, MC will work with managers and supervisors to develop Departmental objectives that tie back to each of the high level goals identified by Executive Management. After finalizing the list of objectives in December, MC will then present those objectives to the Executive Team for review and approval.

Finally, upon approval of the objectives, MC will again enlist the help of the Department's managers and supervisors to define the action items (either projects or tasks) that will be needed to meet each objective. It is my hope that during this time, managers and supervisors will reach out to their employees and solicit thoughts and ideas to bring forward. This effort will culminate in a second meeting, most likely in March or April, after which MC will compile the results into a rough draft strategic plan and present it to the Executive Team for review. The goal is to release an updated CAL FIRE Strategic Plan by the beginning of the 2012 Fire Season.

I realize that updating the CAL FIRE Strategic Plan is an ambitious endeavor. But I believe that it is one well worth the effort, and it is very important to me that the Department's managers and supervisors participate in this effort and help to formulate CAL FIRE's direction over the next five years.

I look forward to participating in this process myself and to reviewing the ideas and suggestions of so many of you. Together, we will establish the direction of the Department for the coming years and establish a plan that will ensure our continued success.

Ken Pimlott, Chief
Acting Director