

Dukes County Wildfire Protection Planning

Earlier this year, the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) secured a grant from FEMA to help hire the expertise needed to create a comprehensive plan that both assesses wildfire risk and identifies mitigation measures to reduce exposure across Dukes County.

With input from local stakeholders including DCR's District Fire Warden, Josh Nigro, we issued a Request for Qualifications on October 16, 2020. By the end of the year, we will be in contract with a highly qualified contractor to execute a Wildfire Protection Plan – one in accordance with the Community Wildfire Protection Plan process.

The following objectives will be our focus:

1. **Identify** all wildland fire hazard possibilities throughout Martha's Vineyard.
2. **Develop** a county map displaying hazardous areas in Martha's Vineyard;
3. **Establish** a guide for ranking priority properties for developing Wildfire Preparedness Plans.
4. **Develop** a countywide system for rating risk of wildfire.
5. **Provide** information on various strategies appropriate for Martha's Vineyard that will address wildland fire hazards and serve as a guide for future Wildfire Preparedness Planning.
6. **Assess** current wildland fire suppression capacities.
7. **Identify** areas needed to increase effectiveness of wildland fire suppression capacities.

The final report will also include wildfire risk maps for each of the seven municipalities, coupled with summary statistics by town. Modeling will indicate flame length, rate of spread, fire type, distance from fire station, and population density. Once a baseline of existing fire suppression assets are inventoried, key geographies will be enumerated. Each of them will be assigned a prescribed mitigation action(s).

Throughout the formation of the plan, MVC, DCR, and local fire chiefs will maintain an open channel of communication with the expert; they will also accompany the contractor on ground truthing visits to ensure the plan reflects our varied terrain and that the modelers grasp any idiosyncrasies in the spatial data used for the analysis. Public input will be solicited through multiple forums. We plan to take advantage of virtual meetings, knowing that it's increasing ease of access will yield robust public participation.

The Manuel F. Correllus State Forest represents the island's largest landholding. With its vast amounts of combustible fuel sources and fast-drying sandy soils, management of the State Forest will prove critical to any county-wide mitigation effort. The final plan will recommend practical, actionable measures that towns and landowners can pursue on their own, along with strategies where coordination can yield even greater risk reduction.

Final plan release will take place by the end of 2021.