

SBALT NEWS

San Benito gets \$758,000 for wildfire resilience

By Laura Kirschmann

In a concerted effort to enhance wildfire resilience and mitigate the devastating impacts of increasingly frequent wildfires, in June the State Coastal Conservancy awarded \$758,000 to the U.C. Cooperative Extension (UCCE) for a San Benito Wildfire Regional Prioritization Plan. Collaboration across San Benito County will result in a plan to manage the ecological role of fire while safeguarding the lives and property of its residents.

"This grant will not only make residents of San Benito safer in the long run but also protect valuable natural resources, such as the Pajaro River and San Benito River water-



Photo by Laura Kirschmann



San Benito Agricultural Land Trust

sheds," said project lead Barb Satink Wolfson, UC Cooperative Extension fire advisor for San Benito, Monterey, Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara Counties.

To carry out the planning tasks, the UCCE will partner with San Benito Resource Conservation District (SBRCD) and the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT). The partners, stakeholders, and community members will convene to assist in prioritizing projects, and the San Benito Fire Safe Council will lead an update of San Benito County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

"SBALT looks forward to reaching out to San Benito County ranchers about how fire has traditionally been used to improve rangeland and how this plan can support the use of fire in their operations," says SBALT board president, Michael Reeves.

Several projects - such as wildfire hazard reduction treatments and prescribed fire - will result from the planning process and will help increase fire safety.



Prescribed burn on the Nyland Property in San Juan Bautista from June 2023 hosted by the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association. Photo by Bob Connolly

To assist landowners and to develop wildfire resilience programming, the grant includes funds for the part-time hire of one staff person each at the SBRCD and SBALT for two years. In addition, it includes funds for the Amah Mutsun Land Trust to assist with identifying areas of cultural significance. To encourage community members to participate, funds will be made available

to help offset the costs of attending meetings and/or workshops so they can contribute to the plan. For more information, contact Barb Satink Wolfson at bsatink@ucanr.edu.

To learn more about the work that SBALT does, visit our website at www.sanbenitolandtrust.org. Please consider a donation to support our involvement in this and other important work. ■