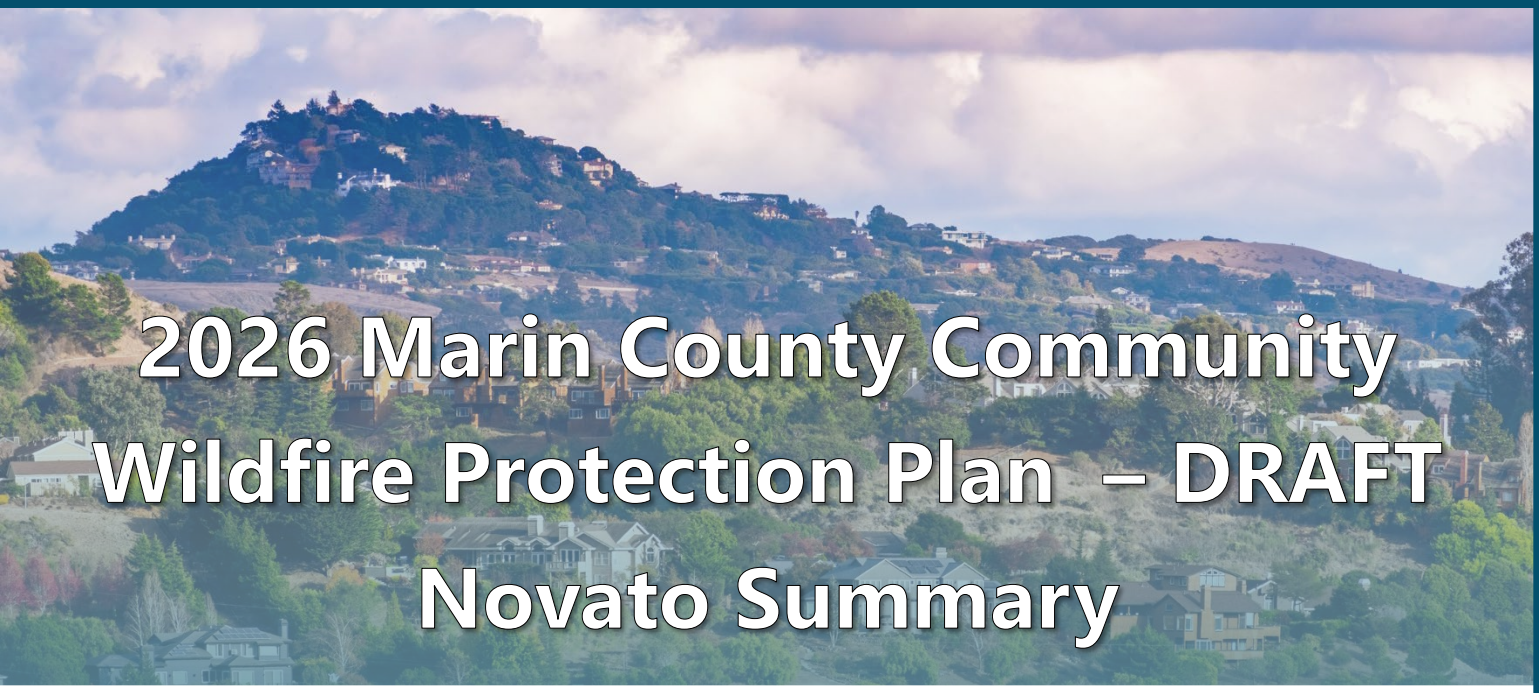


2026 Marin County Community Wildfire Protection Plan – DRAFT

Novato Summary

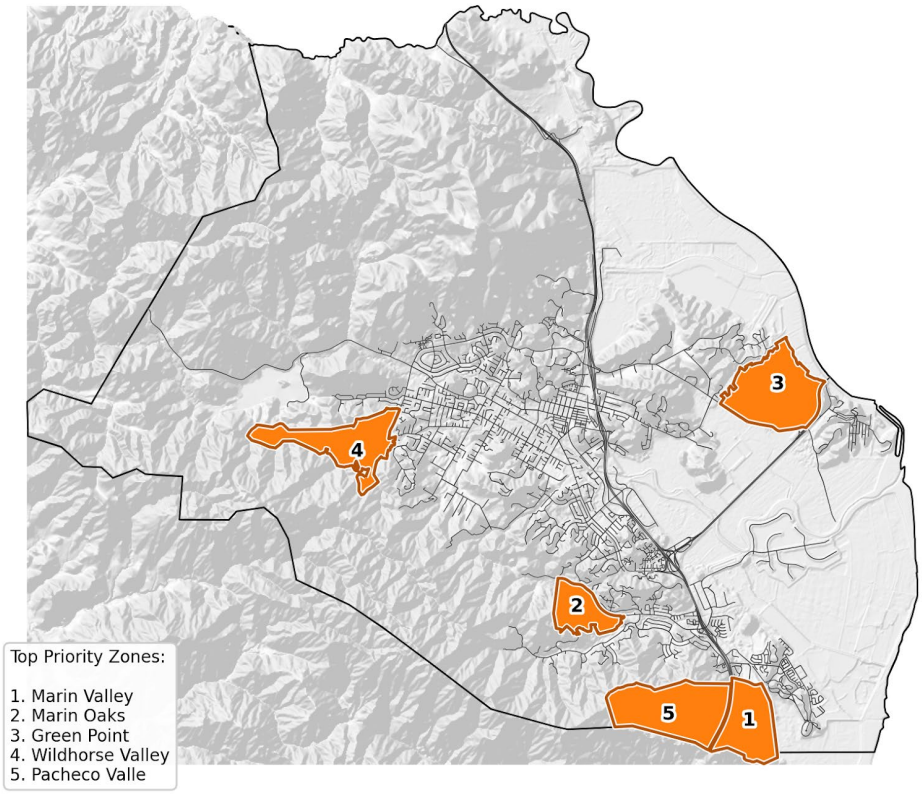
Across many areas of Novato, high modeled fire probability, exposure to fire pathways under both northeast and west wind events, and dense residential development with limited structure separation combine to create elevated wildfire risk. Targeted SPLATS in outlying areas would protect critical infrastructure and reduce the risk of fire transmission into developed neighborhoods. Near-community fuel-reduction projects, including intensive grazing programs and expanded shaded fuel breaks, supported by regular maintenance, would reduce fire exposure to homes in the wildland-urban interface. Additional fuel reduction along roadway corridors would moderate fire behavior along key evacuation routes and support safe ingress and egress. Expanded defensible space compliance and home hardening would reduce the potential for structure loss and decrease the likelihood of structure-to-structure spread if the fire enters the built environment. While detection coverage is generally strong across most of the JPA zone, incremental enhancements in the western outlying areas could improve early awareness. Improvements to Evacuation Planning and Alerting are also warranted in several neighborhoods where fast-moving fires, constrained roadway networks, and household characteristics may complicate timely evacuation.

This zone-specific summary provides a brief description of the highest-priority zones within the Novato JPA zone. These recommendations are intended to be interpreted in conjunction with local knowledge and expertise to develop effective risk-reduction strategies in Novato.

Near-Community Vegetation Management

The highest-priority areas for Near-Community Vegetation Management in Novato include the Marin Valley, Marin Oaks, Green Point, Wildhorse Valley, and Pacheco Valle zones. Although significant investments have been made in these and other areas of the JPA zone (e.g., the Greater Novato Shaded Fuel Break), fire-behavior modeling indicates that additional fuel reduction would further reduce community exposure. In the Wildhorse Valley Zone, modeled flame lengths adjacent to structures exceed 5 feet, indicating conditions that could challenge suppression efforts. This zone is exposed to both northeast and west wind fire weather events, while existing vegetation management projects are not fully configured to address transmission from both directions. Several of the high-priority zones show high modeled rates of fire spread; expanded use of targeted grazing programs, combined with consistent maintenance, would help sustain treatment benefits. Ongoing upkeep is particularly important in fine fuels such as grass, which regenerate quickly.

Novato
Vegetation Management Near Community

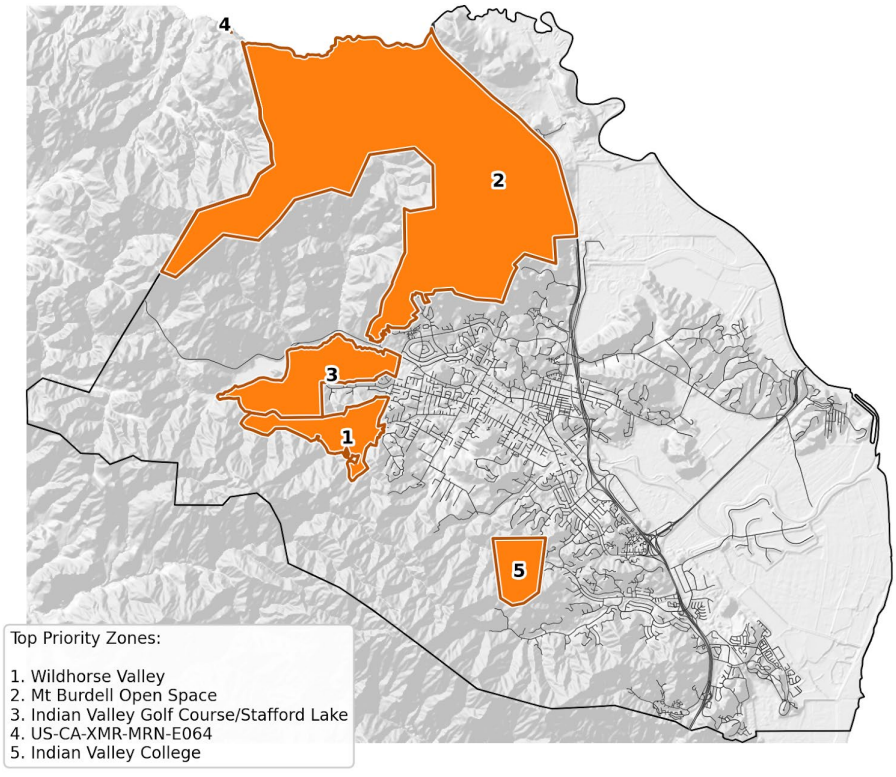


Open-Space Vegetation Management

Open-Space Vegetation Management is most strongly recommended in the sparsely populated areas west and north of Novato's developed areas, including Wildhorse Valley, Mount Burdell Open Space, Indian Valley Golf Course, and Indian Valley College. Weather patterns, land use, and fuel types in these zones coincide to create some of the highest likelihoods of ignition and growth potential in the county. Fire behavior in these areas is anticipated to be active, with flame lengths approaching or exceeding 10 feet in many areas. Fire pathways are expected to move through these zones into adjacent densely populated neighborhoods. Strategically located SPLATs could moderate fire growth and reduce the likelihood of transmission into downwind communities.

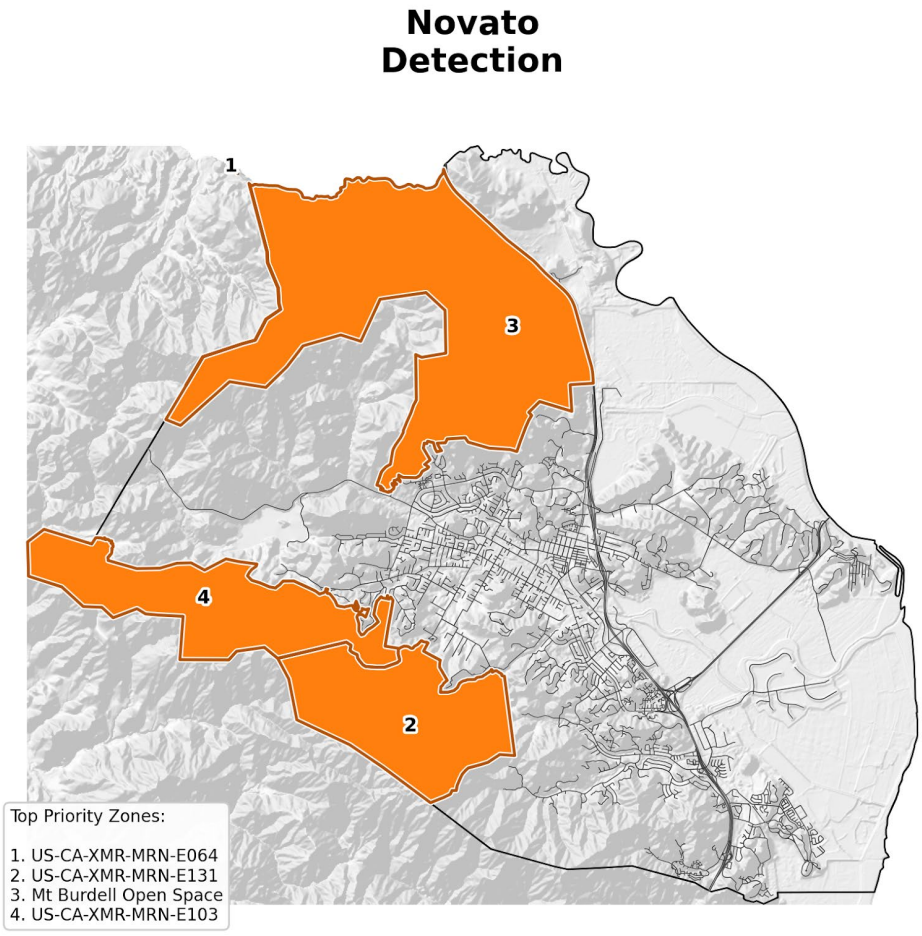
Transmission lines and other critical infrastructure are located throughout these zones. Targeted vegetation management around these assets and within transmission line rights-of-ways would support continuity of service during a wildfire incident. These areas also contribute to local drinking water supply. Reducing the likelihood of high-severity fires in these watersheds can help protect water quality and supply reliability.

Novato
Vegetation Management Open Space



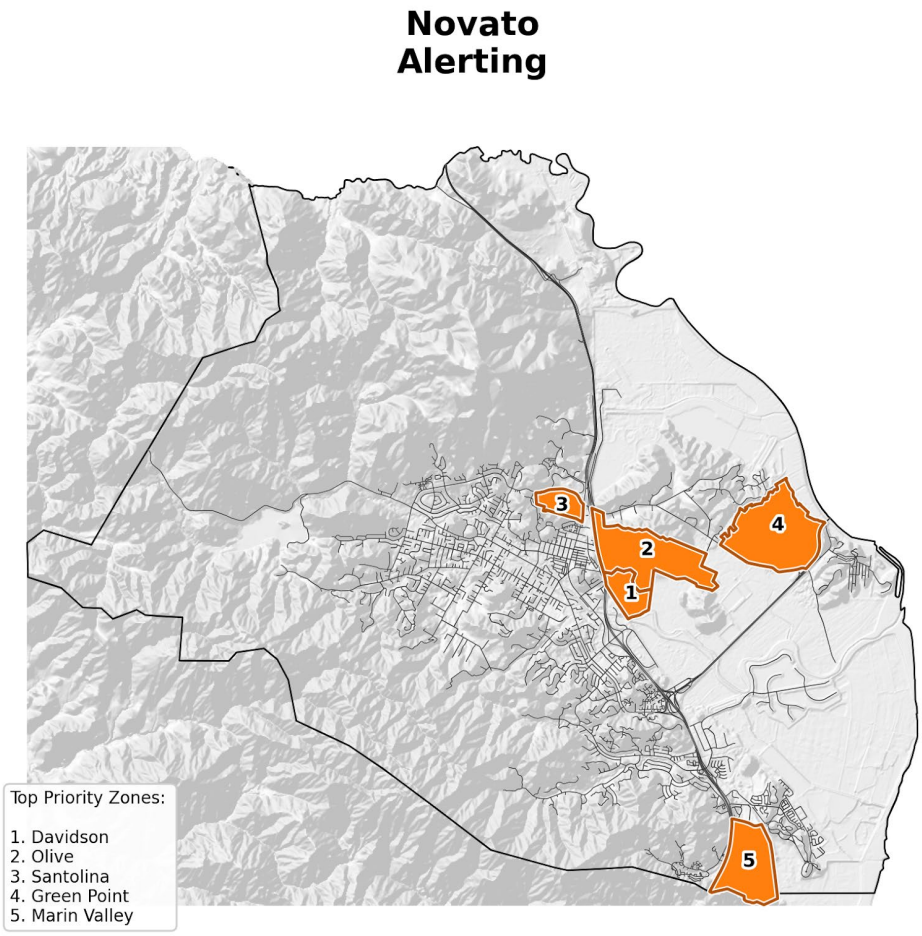
Detection

With extensive fire-detection camera coverage and high population density, new ignitions in Novato are likely to be identified and reported rapidly. In general, fire detection is not a high priority in most developed areas of Novato. However, the western and northern portions of the JPA zone are more remote and include areas outside of the existing camera viewshed. Mount Burdell Open Space, MRN-E131, and MRN-E103 could benefit from enhanced detection efforts. Ignitions in these areas are likely to spread quickly through grass and fine fuels; the coincidence of fuels, weather patterns, and land uses increases the likelihood of new starts within camera blind spots. Incremental improvements to the fire-detection network would strengthen early awareness and support rapid initial attack in these isolated areas.



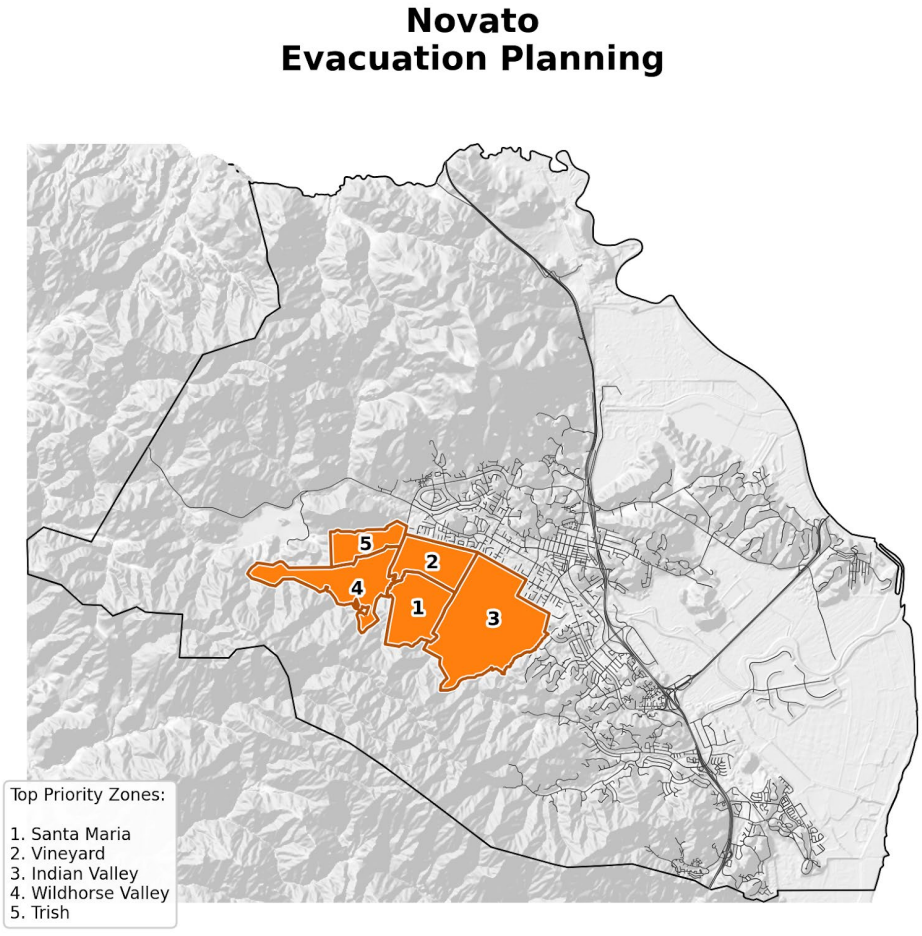
Alerting

Efforts to enhance Alerting systems are most strongly recommended in the Davidson, Santolina, and Olive zones, as well as in the Green Point and Marin Valley zones. Fire-behavior modeling indicates high fire probability and high potential rates of spread in these areas, increasing the importance of timely emergency notification. In these priority areas, most residents are not prepared to receive alerts: in the Marin Valley, Olive, and Davidson zones, only approximately one in three residential parcels have an active AlertMarin subscription. Furthermore, census data indicate that these zones include some of the highest concentrations of residents whose household characteristics may complicate rapid evacuation in the county. Targeted efforts to increase AlertMarin subscriptions and supplemental notification strategies would improve the ability to reach these residents during an emergency.



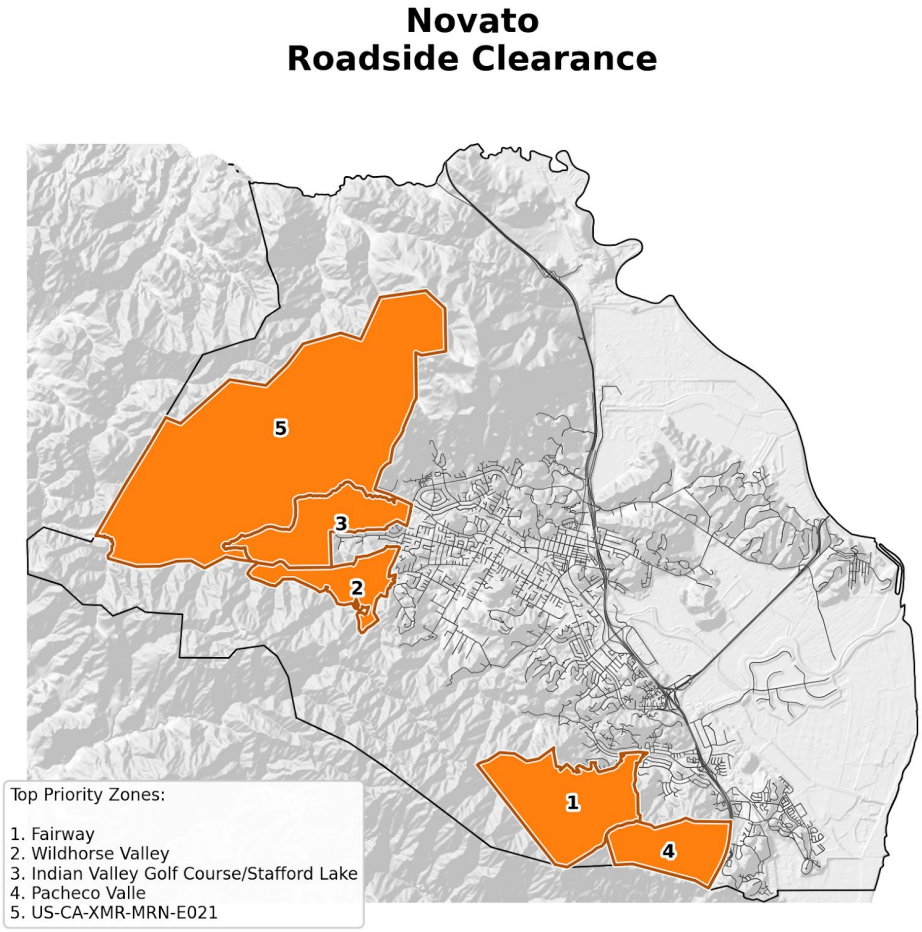
Evacuation Planning

Enhanced evacuation planning is strongly recommended for the Indian Valley and South Novato communities. These zones, including Santa Maria, Vineyard, Indian Valley, Wildhorse Valley, and Trish, have both roads and homes at high risk of fire exposure, making evacuations relatively likely. Indeed, fire likelihood is above the 90th percentile countywide in several of these zones. Furthermore, many of the roads in these zones are narrow, winding, and difficult to travel, elevating the risk of bottlenecks and traffic jams during evacuations. Initiatives to create robust local playbooks and coordinate evacuation resources could improve evacuation outcomes in these communities.



Roadside Clearance

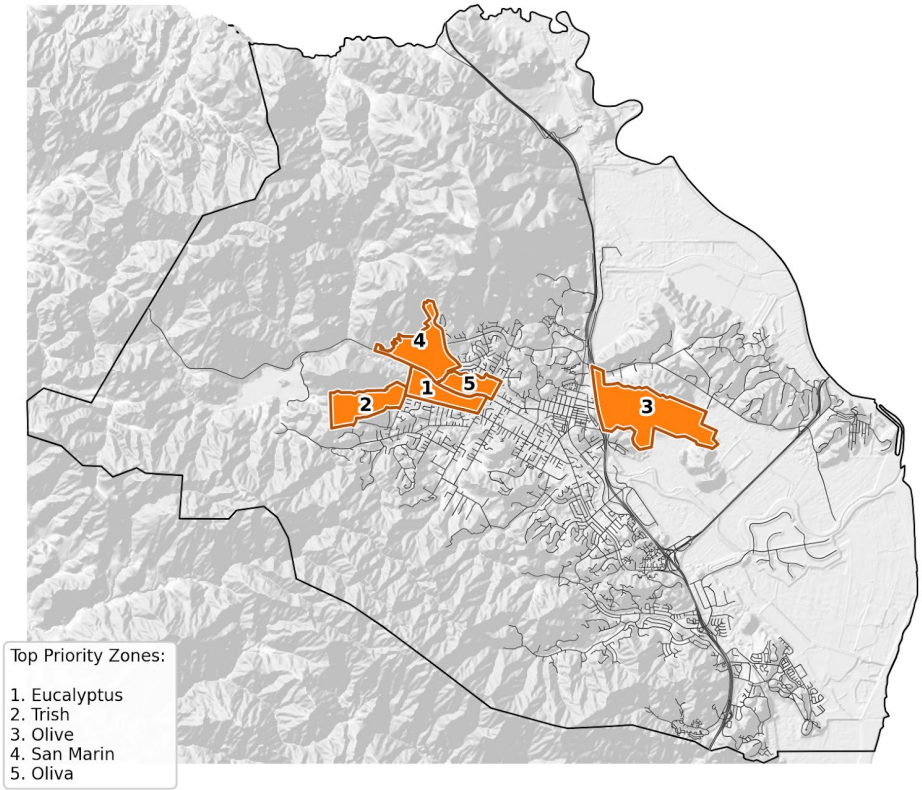
The highest priorities for Roadside Clearance in Novato are at community edges, where communities and roads intersect wildland vegetation and safe travel may be compromised under anticipated high-severity fire conditions. While many roadway segments have already been addressed via the Novato Evacuation Route Clearance projects, analysis of current conditions indicates that additional roadside clearance initiatives would benefit Novato communities. Remaining high-priority zones include Fairway, Wildhorse Valley, Indian Valley Golf Course, Pacheco Valle, and MRN-E021. Fire probability in these areas is very high, and the likelihood of roadside ignitions with growth potential is elevated. Modeled flame lengths adjacent to road segments can average 5 feet, and 8–12% of roadway segments in these zones are not yet fire resilient. Targeted roadside treatments would strengthen travel corridors and improve firefighter access. Moreover, these initiatives can reduce the likelihood of roadside ignitions by limiting fuel receptivity along the roadside.



Residential Risk Reduction

The highest-priority areas for enhanced Residential Risk Reduction are the Eucalyptus, Trish, San Marin, and Oliva zones in western Novato, and the Olive Zone east of Highway 101. These zones are characterized by a high rate of unresolved defensible-space and home-hardening vulnerabilities, closely spaced structures, and elevated exposure to high-severity fires. In many of these neighborhoods, the average structure spacing is less than 10 feet, increasing the potential for structure-to-structure transmission if a fire becomes established within the community. Fire behavior analysis shows these communities are likely to be exposed to rapid rates of spread, high flame lengths, and significant ember exposure. These evacuation zones also experience longer fire response times relative to other areas of the county. As a result, pre-fire mitigation on residential parcels is likely to play a significant role in reducing potential structure losses.

Novato
On Parcel Risk Reduction



Countywide Comparison

The table below compares priorities in the Novato JPA zone relative to the rest of the county. Unlike the summaries above, which identify the top five zones for each theme, the data in this table indicate how often high-priority zones occur within each theme.

Theme	Number of Zones at or Above 75th Percentile Countywide
Near-Community Vegetation Management	1
Open-Space Vegetation Management	23
Detection	4
Alerting	20
Roadside Clearance	3
Evacuation Planning	16
Residential Risk Reduction	14