

Defensible Space Program

Staff Report – Program History, Outcomes,
Funding Status & Staffing Recommendation

Fiscal Year 2026 / 2027



Protecting Paradise

Background & Context



Camp Fire Destruction

The 2018 Camp Fire destroyed 90–95% of the Town’s structures, leaving thousands of vacant lots unattended and unmaintained, creating dangerous fuel conditions.



Rapid Vegetation Regrowth

Invasive species reestablished across vacant parcels throughout the community, dramatically increasing fuel continuity and the potential for parcel-to-parcel fire spread.



Displaced Community

Property owners focused on recovery efforts, making vegetation management difficult.


Limited Enforcement Capacity

A single Fire Prevention Inspector managed 11,000+ parcels while also handling plan review, fire system inspections, and state-mandated occupancy inspections.

**Defensible space compliance hovered at just 47–69% through 2022 —
leaving the community at elevated wildfire risk**

Program Development & Staffing

Pre-2022	2022	2022+	2024
<p>1 Inspector</p> <p>Single inspector overseeing 11,000+ parcels. Largely complaint-driven enforcement model.</p>	<p>2nd Inspector Added</p> <p>Transitioned from reactive to proactive, structured town-wide inspection cycle.</p>	<p>Escrow Requirement</p> <p>Council-mandated Certificate of Compliance for property transfers. ~122 additional inspections/month</p>	<p>Full Program</p> <p>Two limited-term Defensible Space Inspectors + admin support added. Funded largely by FEMA HMGP.</p>

 Both Defensible Space Inspectors are certified as ICC Fire Inspector I and POST PC 832, providing technical expertise and legally defensible enforcement authority.

Compliance Results: 2021–2025

≤69%

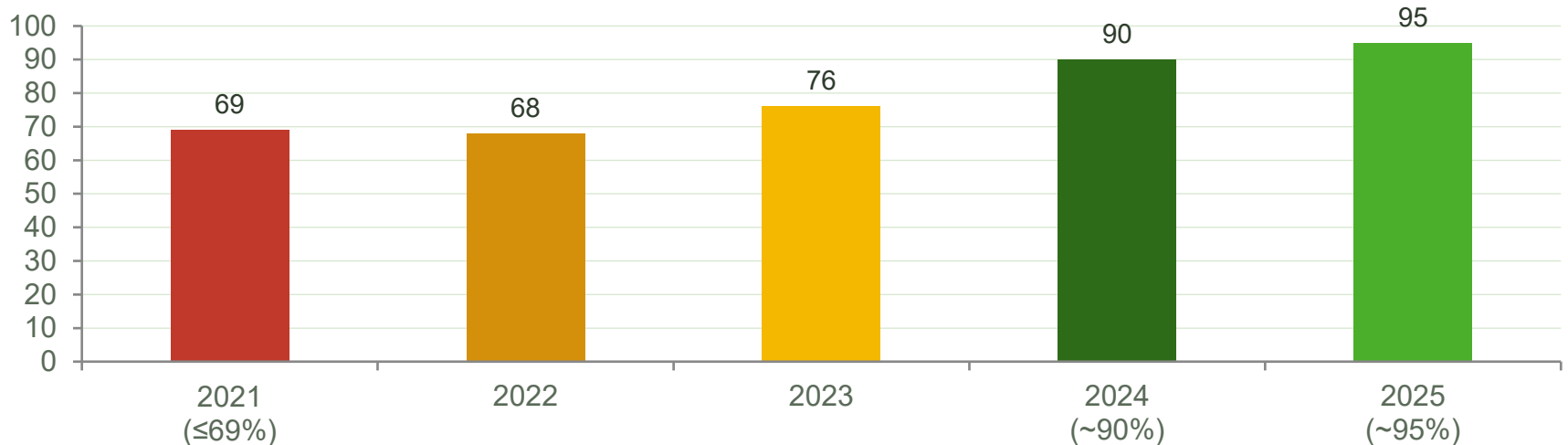
Compliance through 2022
Pre-program baseline

~90%

Compliance in 2024
Post HMGP investment

~95%

Compliance in 2025
Highest since Camp Fire



Why It Matters: Risk, Insurance & Economy



Wildfire Risk Reduction

- Reduces fuel continuity across parcels
- Limits parcel-to-parcel fire spread
- Improves emergency response effectiveness
- Sustained compliance = sustained risk reduction



Insurance & Economic Stability

- Supports continued access to private insurance markets
- Reduces reliance on California FAIR Plan
- Key factor in Town's request for improved rate consideration
- Essential for financing, property transactions, and rebuilding



Community & Economic Recovery

- Enhances public confidence in safety and livability
- Supports property values and long-term economic stability
- 95% compliance as program benchmark
- Regression would re-expose community to significantly higher risk



Aligned with Adopted Frameworks

The Defensible Space Program directly implements the goals of six wildfire mitigation frameworks:

Federal	National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (NCWFMS) Vegetation management and defensible space as core national priorities.
State	California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan (CWFRAP) Community resilience and enforcement identified as essential strategies.
Regional	Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Local framework for reducing wildfire risk.
County	Butte County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) Interagency coordination and community education goals.
Local	Town of Paradise General Plan Safety Element and Long-Term Recovery Plan (LTRP) Direct policy mandate for vegetation (fuels) management and enforcement.

Funding Status & Fiscal Impact

Current program: 75% FEMA HMGP / 25% Town General Fund
Grant expires September 30, 2026

FY 2026/2027 Estimated Costs – Two Limited-Term Inspector Positions (Fully Burdened)

Funding Source	Jul–Sep 2026	Oct 2026 – Jun 2027	FY 2026–27 Total
FEMA (75%)	\$35,199	—	\$35,199
Town Match / General Fund (25%)	\$11,733	\$156,440	\$168,173*
TOTAL	\$46,932	\$156,440	\$203,372

** Reflects 25% Town match through Sep 2026, then 100% Town funding pending new grant award.*

2025 Abatement Costs

- \$269,579 expended to abate 171 non-compliant properties
- Only \$40,470 recovered via property tax special assessment
- Net unrecovered cost: ~\$229,109
- Raised compliance by only ~1.5% - proactive enforcement is far more cost-effective

Long-Term Employment Costs (Staff >6 months)

- CalPERS: 15.7% total (7.96% Town + 7.75% employee) during active employment
- OPEB: Town pays 80% of retiree & spouse medical premiums (PEPRA employees minimum retirement age 62)
- ~\$22,500/yr per retiree prior to Medicare eligibility (age 65)
- ~\$12,800/yr per retiree after Medicare eligibility

Council Direction: Staffing Options

Option 1 – Convert to FTE (Recommended)

Convert existing limited-term positions to full-time equivalent positions effective October 16, 2026. Utilize the General Fund to fund the positions.

Option 2 – Separate & Rehire (Limited Term)

Separate employment on October 15, 2026, then re-hire on October 16, 2026, as limited-term positions for a term determined by the Council. Utilize the General Fund to fund the positions.

Option 3 – Separate & Rehire (Grant-Funded)

Separate employment on October 15, 2026. Rehire as limited-term positions if/when grant funds are received to fully fund the positions.

Option 4 – Allow Positions to Term Out

Allow the positions to term out on October 15, 2026, and take no further action.

TOWN OF PARADISE

Discussion & Direction

Fire Prevention Division | Defensible Space Inspection Program

