

TOWN SEAL and LETTERHEAD should go here

September 20, 2023

USDA Forest Service
Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) Grant Review Committee

Dear CWDG Grant Review Committee Members,

We write to extend our thorough support for the Martha's Vineyard Commission's (MVC) wildfire mitigation application that, once funded, will give us valuable capacity to make our landscapes more resilient and provide a lasting framework to continually mitigate our wildfire risk. The application fully subscribes to the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and directly addresses its three tenets: Fire Adapted Communities; Safe, Effective Wildfire Response; and Resilient Landscapes.

In 2021, each Fire Chief participated alongside their counterparts in identifying acute vulnerabilities across their respective towns as part of our Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). We recognize the threats do not stop at town lines and the issue must be approached holistically. Accordingly, every facet of this grant proposal has benefits to both host and neighboring towns.

There is a shared understanding that we can more effectively budget, coordinate, and implement mitigation recommendations from the CWPP with a Community Wildfire Mitigation Specialist (CWMS) who can a) convene and collaborate amongst a multitude of stakeholders and property owners and b) possess a strong command of the subject matter to build confidence and trust across all parties. The MV Commission is well positioned to place this new hire under their roof and provide the position with the support necessary to reduce our immediate risk exposure while also establishing stronger frameworks to better address this enduring issue. We are open to discussing an appropriate cost-sharing mechanism that includes the Towns to permanently fund this position at the sunset of any CWDG-funded term – and will participate in the new hire's task prioritization, along with their annual review. The CWMS will immediately become a fixture on our monthly island-wide Fire Chiefs meeting agendas.

The proposal also invests in improved water supply, another facet of community preparedness critical in some of our more remote corners of the island. The Fire Chiefs have a strong history of mutual aid and their resources continued to be stretched with the nearly 25% increase in year-round population growth tracked in the most recent decennial federal census, to say nothing of the mounting assets found on the properties of our seasonal homeowners. We will be even more effective with the necessary suppression resources and have identified strategic pockets of our towns where there is a glaring deficit in proposing new installations.

We have no shortage of community values at risk, and we roundly support this approach to greater coordination across our community's wildfire mitigation practices.

Sincerely,

P.O. BOX 1447 • 33 NEW YORK AVENUE • OAK BLUFFS • MA • 02557
508.693.3453 • FAX: 508.693 7894 • INFO@MVCOMMISSION.ORG • WWW.MVCOMMISSION.ORG

REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY OF DUKES COUNTY • SERVING: AQUINNAH, CHILMARK, EDGARTOWN, GOSNOLD, OAK BLUFFS TISBURY, & WEST TISBURY