

Natural Disasters and Resilience – The Insights of Community Residents

California Community Listening Session Results



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Part of

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SITE INFORMATION:

State: California (Butte Co=BU; Fresno/Madera Co=FR; Santa Barbara/Ventura Co=SB)

Community Site of Listening Session: Online via Zoom

Number of Attendees: Twenty-two (22)

MIX OF ATTENDEES:

Participants. The participants of the listening session were typically 35 years old or older with a large proportion of adults, mostly male, mostly Caucasian. The majority of them represented their work or volunteer organization and few specifically identified as residents who were directly affected or even lost their home. The organizations represented included county emergency managers, county law enforcement, first responders, residents/homeowners, Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) representatives, representatives of local NGO's, school district leaders, other local government representatives, and small business owners.

Organizations. Specifically, the organizations represented included the following: Emergency Manager for County; Resource Conservation District; Central Sierra Resiliency Fund ; Resident and California Naturalist Instructor; Creek Fire Recovery Collaborative, Pine Ridge Volunteer Fire Department, Pine Ridge Property Owners; American Red Cross; Fresno County Office of Emergency Services (OES); Fresno County Department of Social Services; Highway 168 FireSafe Council; Butte County Animal Control; Fair Manager (location for human, livestock and pet sheltering); Caring Choices and Butte-Glenn VOAD; Butte County Sheriff's Office; local High School Principal; Santa Barbara County Department of Agriculture; Ventura County Agriculture Commissioner; Montecito YMCA; Montecito Fire Department; Climate Resilience, Community Environmental Council; Retired US Forest Service Biologist; Former Office of Emergency Management Director

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS/COMMENTS:

In all three locations, participants generally felt there was strong capacity among local emergency responders and community organizations to address immediate impacts and human needs arising from natural disasters, but a significant need exists to better manage the long-term consequences and to build individual/family resilience especially among the most

vulnerable (elderly, low income, homeless). Also there is a need for better federal/state/county coordination and financial planning and support (both pre and post-disaster). Some groups reported a need for ensuring reliable technological support and streamlining of emergency communications. In more than one community the compounding impacts of multiple (sequential or overlapping) disasters was a complicating factor. Also, notwithstanding the initial information provided on the definition of resilience there seems to be a tendency for people to focus on “preparedness and response” especially in the context of very specific disasters (typically the most recent) as opposed to longer term and broader aspects of community resilience.

PART II. The Community Resilient Features of Your Community

Write the major positive and negative features noted by participants in your listening session. *Place an asterisk by those features that were most often selected by the small groups taking part in the session.*

Positive Features	Negative Features
BU1, FR1: People in my community help each other out*	BU1: [In]ability to handle the long-term needs (what happens next), services and resources large-scale (scope, magnitude, duration, and reoccurrence of disasters).
BU2: My community has effective leaders	BU2 Communication across local, state and federal levels is lacking (although it is strong at county level, just less so across the others).
SB1, FR2: Local leaders actively work with local organizations and agencies to get things done*	SB1: My community [doesn't treat] treats people fairly no matter their background.
	SB2: Local businesses (and property owners [added]) [don't] have sound plans in place in the event they are impacted by natural disasters.
	FR1: My community [doesn't work or not sure if they work] works with leaders, organizations and agencies in surrounding counties on disaster planning and disaster management activities.
	FR2: My community [doesn't have] has the resource it needs to take care of community problems or challenges.

Note: for the negative features, most of these were originally phrased as positive statements, but are listed because they did not exist or were not as prevalent or as they should have been; the text in [brackets] provide the negative statement. The top two features are presented for each community, but these are not necessarily ranked in order.

PART III. Past Experiences with Natural Disasters in the Community

List of the Natural Disasters Experienced by the Community
• Wildland Fire and Smoke (BU, FR, SB)
• Pandemic (BU, SB, FR)
• Flooding (inland/riparian) (BU, SB, FR)
• Drought (BU, SB, FR)
• Power Outages (BU, SB)
• Debris Flows (SB)
• Earthquakes (SB)
• High Winds (SB, FR)
• Bark Beetle Damage (Tree Mortality) (SB, FR)
• Invasive Pests (SB)
• Oil Spill (SB)
• Extreme Heat Events (SB)
• Freezing Events (SB)
• Air Quality (i.e., pollution due to wildfire smoke, smog, soot, refineries, high winds, etc.) (SB)
• Landslide (SB)

Note: This is the complete listing of natural disasters in each of the three community groups. The community initials shown in parentheses indicate the natural disaster was identified in the last 4-5 years in the community. Some of these disasters may fall outside purely natural disasters but have been included anyway.

List the key items participants stated their community “did well” or “fell short” in terms of responding to *natural disasters*.

Did Well	Fell Short
BU1: Became better prepared over time	BU1: Individual preparedness
BU2: Always looking to improve response (VOADs, Emergency messaging, AgPass and other improvements in animal operations, CERTs)	BU2: Getting the right resources to people in the right time frame (more of a long term issue, e.g. taking months to get disaster victims housing)
BU3: Meeting the immediate needs of people	BU3: Navigating resources across complex bureaucracies (federal, state, county) especially in the disbursement of resources/funds.
SB1: Support for our community members experiencing homelessness	SB1: Insurance/access to insurance
SB2: Strong networks preparing for response and recovery - long standing relationships, working together across agencies	SB2: Need better support for elderly, disabled and non-driving folks
SB3: Mental health services and related support post-disaster	SB3: Communications - especially multilingual - and having reliable technology to get messages out
SB4: Mobilizing pre-positioning and evacuation, plus transportation and utility recovery - flexibility of transportation redundancy	
FR1: Response of FEMA and Fire Department(s) were outstanding, Coordinated county response	FR1: Management of drought impact on fire risk at both local and federal level.
FR2: LGU Response including County Board of Supervisors responded well; Sierra Resource Conservation District; NRCS; Red-CROSS, Animal Rescue Organizations #3 Visitors Bureau, Resiliency Fund, City Public Works, Local assistance Center (LAC)	FR2: Acknowledgement of greater risk associated with overgrown forest (fuels loading) and climate change.
FR3: Strong community response to provide support for various needs (accommodations, food, water, and support from local businesses).	FR3: Lack of communication and coordination of multiple aspects including evacuation, sheltering and procedures related to the additional complicating factors (e.g., pandemic, changes to housing market etc.)

PART IV. Strengthening Your Community's Resilience to Disasters: High Priority Areas to Address

The links to the full presentation slide decks for each of the three communities are provided below.

1. **Butte Community** Presentation and Notes:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p0ABMaKqIHnEO0JO4RMk17aNcrmiFAR4/view?usp=sharing>

2. **Santa Barbara/Ventura Community** Presentation and Notes:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hxocorU5R-Nb30TpsHE6OZv7hh2m2A0r/view?usp=sharing>

3. **Fresno/Madera Community** Presentation and Notes:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/16Rzw81TQ4UB5ebKzVjTK6AS95a_qiQ59/view?usp=sharing

FINAL SECTION: How EDEN Can Best Address Your Needs

Key resources the community is currently using to guide their natural disaster management efforts
BU1: Education and awareness (e.g. disaster preparedness, practical tips, evacuation routes, family emergency plans.)
BU2: Communications and social media training
BU3: Fuels management and home hardening [for wildland fire]
SB1: Cal Poly Fire Center of Excellence (WUI Institute)-
SB2: Best practices for effective community communication
SB3: Support for mental health
FR1: People and recovery organizations
FR2: Fire and natural resource management-education- using fire as a tool
FR3: Communications (with private sector: insurance), in working with the local organizations and community groups like Fire Safe Council;
What role they would like to see EDEN play in terms of strengthening the disaster and capacity-building efforts of their community.
BU1: Facilitate and organize meetings
BU2: Facilitate and organize trainings
SB1: Serve as the interface between scientists and practitioners for best practices
SB2: Facilitate task force meetings with different stakeholder groups
SB3: Develop training academy
SB4: Lead needs assessment between stakeholder groups
FR1: Agriculture and Natural Resources – Research on reforestation, what is future?

FR: Grant writing /project management
FR: Hands-on education and training on best practices, communicating best science / data collection & management, demonstration (ANR 8000 – 8386 publication): Recovering from Wildfire: A Guide for California’s Landowners.
Suggestions by participants of how EDEN information and training could be best delivered to communities.
BU1, FR1: In person, face-to-face, experiential learning, hands-on delivery
BU2, SB1: Trauma informed and/or trauma aware approaches
SB2: Training/certification on emergency management for two audiences: 1) community members; and 2) academy for people in emergency operations centers.
SB3: Need to avoid/deal with disaster fatigue - how to encourage a sense of salience - monuments to disaster - keep in hearts and minds
FR2: Local paper articles/seasonal inserts
FR3: Local Facebook pages, home owners meeting, science-day (very effective in peer-to-peer and community education)

Final Observations by the Host Site (please share any information you would like to provide at this time):

- SA: How representative were the participants in the listening session of the total population of people affected in the communities. Our participants' were likely much more well informed than others in the community.
- GI: There is definitely a need to further articulate the kinds of support UC ANR and EDEN can provide in addition to the other players in the emergency management and community resilience space. It is important to clarify our niche and ensure our efforts complement and not confuse those of others including the local and federal response.
- GI: There is strong interest in hands-on and in-person training
- GI: There is interest and a need for trauma informed approaches and methods for building community resilience
- GI: There is a need to strengthen efforts to reach disadvantaged and most vulnerable groups in the community.
- GI: Wildland fire is a critical topic of concern
- GI: Awareness and education campaigns are important for a variety of topics, but they also need to be culturally relevant, occur not too often, and not simply "telling people what to do.
- GI: There is a very long list of natural disasters that affect the state and community. Resilience building needs avoid focusing on just the most recent disaster, but build broad resilience to the myriad of hazards.
- SA: Strategies using best practices need to be implemented to increase effectiveness, and Extension can help inform community groups on what those are.
- SA: EDEN and state facilitators may have benefited from collecting more extensive demographic information about the session participants, including: age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, annual income, occupation, housing status, marital status, number of children etc. This information could be matched with the demographics of the region and help ensure that feedback generated from the listening sessions provides a representative picture of the community's views on resilience.
- As a collective effort of UCANR academics and staff who facilitated the 2020 CA EDEN Community Resilience Online Listening Sessions, one key concern is to ensure those with the least resources are less impacted. The burdens and benefits of emergency disasters and community resilience should be balanced through equitable resource allocation and distribution, and adaptively managed based on those needs.

Quotes or Paraphrased Comments of Participants

The following quotes or paraphrased comments of listening session participants are provide as a supplement to our report.

- “We had great leadership during the Oroville Dam Evacuation, people in the community trusted our Sheriff to make decisions.”
- “I saw people helping each other out during the Camp Fire Evacuation, complete strangers getting into others cars and driving them out of the area when we did not have enough emergency personnel.”
- “Before the Oroville Dam Crisis we had not planned for community-wide disasters”
- “We have not had a full school year for Butte County students since 2016”
- “We need individual preparedness, can't rely on the government to always be there to help you.”
- “We are good at the fast break...but the long game, overtime, and double-time is rough”

Please email or mail the report document and other requested documents to:

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