**Needles PUblic Utility Authority**

**Wildfire Mitigation Plan**

**2021 INFORMATIONAL RESPONSE**

RESPONSES TO Wildfire safety Advisory Board’s 2021 Guidance Advisory Opinion

**June 30, 2021**

# PURPOSE OF THIS 2021 INFORMATIONAL RESPONSE

The California Wildfire Safety Advisory Board (WSAB) issued the *Guidance Advisory Opinion for the 2021 Wildfire Mitigation Plans of Electric Publicly Owned Utilities and Cooperatives* (“2021 WSAB Guidance Advisory Opinion”) on December 15, 2020. The Needles Public Utility Authority (NPUA) provides this document to the WSAB in order to respond to each of the recommendations included in the 2021 WSAB Guidance Advisory Opinion. POUs will provide a narrative response and/or a cross reference to the location in NPUA’s Wildfire Mitigation Plan (WMP) where the topic is addressed. Where the recommendation is not applicable to NPUA, the response will provide a brief description supporting this conclusion.

# Context setting information

**WSAB** requested that POUs provide an informational table to assist the Staff and Board member in understanding the unique characteristics of each POU.

**Table 1: Context-Setting Information**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Utility Name** | **NPUA** | |
| **Service Territory Size** | 31 square miles | |
| **Owned Assets** | ☐ Transmission  Distribution ☐ Generation | |
| **Number of Customers Served** | 2,850 customer accounts | |
| **Population Within Service Territory** | 4976 people | |
| **Customer Class Makeup** | *Number of Accounts* | *Share of Total Load (MWh)* |
| 80% Residential;  20% Commercial | 80% Residential;  20% Commercial |
| **Service Territory**  **Location/Topography[[1]](#footnote-1)** | 0% Agriculture  30% Barren/Other  0% Conifer Forest  0% Conifer Woodland  60% Desert  0% Hardwood Forest  0% Hardwood Woodland  0% Herbaceous  0% Shrub  10% Urban  0% Water | |
| **Service Territory**  **Wildland Urban Interface**[[2]](#footnote-2)  **(based on total area)** | 0% Wildland Urban Interface;  0% Wildland Urban Intermix; | |
| **Percent of Service Territory in CPUC High Fire Threat Districts (based on total area)** | ☐Includes maps  Tier 2: 0%  Tier 3: 0% | |
| **Prevailing Wind Directions & Speeds by Season** | ☐ Includes maps  **Wind Speed:**  March-July: 9 mph  July-March: 7.6 mph  **Wind Direction:**  February-November: West  November-February: East. | |
| **Miles of Owned Lines Underground and/or Overhead** | Overhead Dist.: 63 miles  Overhead Trans.: 34 miles  Underground Dist.: 0 miles  Underground Trans.: 12 miles | |
| **Explanatory Note 1 -** *Methodology for Measuring “Miles”:* [e.g., circuit miles, line miles.] | |
| **Percent of Owned Lines in CPUC High Fire Threat Districts** | *Overhead Distribution Lines as % of Total Distribution System*  *(Inside and Outside Service Territory)* | |
| Tier 2: 0%  Tier 3: 0% | |
| *Overhead Transmission Lines as % of Total Transmission System*  *(Inside and Outside Service Territory)* | |
| Tier 2: 0%  Tier 3: 0% | |
| **Customers have ever lost service due to an IOU PSPS event?** | ☐ Yes  No | |
| **Customers have ever been notified of a potential loss of service to due to a forecasted IOU PSPS event?** | ☐ Yes  No | |
| **Has developed protocols to pre-emptively shut off electricity in response to elevated wildfire risks?** | ☐ Yes  No | |
| **Has previously pre-emptively shut off electricity in response to elevated wildfire risk?** | ☐ Yes  No  If yes, then provide the following data for calendar year 2020: N/A  *Number of shut-off events*: N/A  *Customer Accounts that lost service for >10 minutes:* N/A  *For prior response, average duration before service restored:* N/A | |

# Cross Reference to Statutory requirements

**WSAB** requested that POUs provide a clear roadmap as to where each statutory requirement is addressed within the POU WMP.

**Table 2: Cross References to Statutory Requirements**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Requirement** | **Statutory Language** | **Location in WMP** |
| **Persons Responsible** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(A):** An accounting of the **responsibilities of persons** responsible for executing the plan. | Section III  Page 3 |
| **Objectives of the Plan** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(B):** The **objectives** of the wildfire mitigation plan. | Section II  Page: 2 |
| **Preventive Strategies** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(C):** A description of the **preventive strategies and programs to be adopted by the local publicly owned electric utility** or electrical cooperative to minimize the risk of its electrical lines and equipment causing catastrophic wildfires, including consideration of dynamic climate change risks. | Section IV.E-IV.K  Page 9, 11 |
| **Evaluation Metrics** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(D):** A description of the **metrics the local publicly owned electric utility or electrical cooperative plans to use to evaluate the wildfire mitigation plan’s performance** and the assumptions that underlie the use of those metrics. | Section VII  Page 12 |
| **Impact of Metrics** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(E):** A discussion of how the **application of previously identified metrics** to previous wildfire mitigation plan performances has informed the wildfire mitigation plan. | Section VII.C  Page 14 |
| **Deenergization Protocols** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(F):** **Protocols for disabling reclosers and deenergizing portions of the electrical distribution system** that consider the associated impacts on public safety, as well as protocols related to mitigating the public safety impacts of those protocols, including impacts on critical first responders and on health and communication infrastructure. | Section IV.K  Page 11 |
| **Customer Notification Procedures** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(G):** Appropriate and feasible **procedures for notifying a customer** who may be impacted by the deenergizing of electrical lines. The procedures shall consider the need to notify, as a priority, critical first responders, health care facilities, and operators of telecommunications infrastructure. | Section IV.K  Page 11 |
| **Vegetation Management** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(H):**Plans for vegetation management. | Section IV.G  Page 9 |
| **Inspections** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(I):** **Plans for inspections** of the local publicly owned electric utility’s or electrical cooperative’s electrical infrastructure. | Section IV.H  Page 11 |
| **Prioritization of Wildfire Risks** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(J):** A list that **identifies, describes, and prioritizes all wildfire risks, and drivers for those risks, throughout the local publicly owned electric utility’s or electrical cooperative’s service territory**. The list shall include, but not be limited to, both of the following:  **(i)** Risks and risk drivers associated with design, construction, operation, and maintenance of the local publicly owned electric utility’s or electrical cooperative’s equipment and facilities.  **(ii)** Particular risks and **risk drivers** associated with topographic and climatological risk factors throughout the different parts of the local publicly owned electric utility’s or electrical cooperative’s service territory. | Section IV.A  Page 7 |
| **CPUC Fire Threat Map Adjustments** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(K):** Identification of any **geographic area in the local publicly owned electric utility’s or electrical cooperative’s service territory** that is a higher wildfire threat than is identified in a commission fire threat map, and identification of where the commission should expand a high fire threat district based on new information or changes to the environment. | Section IV.C  Page 8 |
| **Enterprisewide Risks** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(L):** A methodology for identifying and presenting **enterprisewide** safety risk and wildfire-related risk. | Section IV.B  Page 7 |
| **Restoration of Service** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(M):** A statement of how the local publicly owned electric utility or electrical cooperative will **restore service after a wildfire**. | Section VI  Page 12 |
| **Monitor and Audit** | **PUC § 8387(b)(2)(N):** A description of the processes and procedures the local publicly owned electric utility or electrical cooperative shall use to do all of the following  (i) **Monitor and audit** the implementation of the wildfire mitigation plan.  (ii) **Identify any deficiencies** in the wildfire mitigation plan or its implementation, and correct those deficiencies.  (iii) Monitor and audit the effectiveness of electrical line and equipment inspections, including inspections performed by contractors, that are carried out under the plan, other applicable statutes, or commission rules. | Section VII.D  Page 14 |

# WSAB Guidance Advisory Opinion RecommendationS

The WSAB Guidance Advisory Opinion identifies 14 specific recommendations that POUs are requested to address in their 2021 WMPs. As specified in Public Utilities Code § 8387(b)(1), each POU is required to perform a comprehensive revision to the POU’s WMP at least once every three years. Pursuant to this guidance, the POUs will be updating their WMPs based on the direction of their local governing boards within this 3-year cycle. Because the WSAB’s recommendations have been provided after the initial WMP submission, the POUs will have varying capacities to fully address each recommendation in their 2021 WMP. This Section IV restates each of the WSAB recommendations and provides an opportunity for each POU to do one or more of the following: (1) provide a narrative response to the recommendation; (2) provide a cross refence to where in the POU’s WMP this topic is addressed; (3) describe why the recommendation is not applicable to the POU; or (4) inform the WSAB of the POU’s intent to address the recommendation at the point of the POU’s next comprehensive revision, occurring in either the 2022 or 2023 WMP.

## Plan Structure

**WSAB Recommendation #1:** Provide context-setting information about the POU and provide a simple guide to where the statutory requirements are addressed within the WMP.

***POU Response:*** See Sections II and III above.

**WSAB Recommendation #2:** Provide a short description of the POU’s public review and approval (if required) for the WMP. This description may also include a brief explanation of the funding mechanisms for wildfire mitigation efforts.

***POU Response:*** NPUA’s Wildfire Mitigation Plan is presented to and adopted by the City of Needles’s Board of Public Utilities (Board) at a publicly noticed meeting of the Board.

**WSAB Recommendation #3:** Identify where the POU has posted the most recent Independent Evaluator (IE) Report and if your POU plans to enhance future IE reports, please summarize in what ways.

***POU Response:*** The NPUA has posted the latest adopted Wildfire Mitigation Plan and IE report online at [www.cityofneedles.com](http://www.cityofneedles.com). The NPUA intends to review the plan annually and make any adjustments necessary.

**WSAB Recommendation #4:** Develop, in collaboration with POU industry associations, WMP guidelines for future WMPs, understanding that it may take multiple cycles for POUs to integrate these recommendations into the WMPs.

***POU Response:*** This document is intended to include, as appropriate, responses to the recommendations in the WSAB’s Guidance Advisory Opinion for the POUs’ 2021 WMP.  This document also represents the combined effort of the POU industry associations to further the development of a template to respond to the WSAB’s Guidance Advisory Opinion in a future reporting WMP cycle.

## Customer Impacts

**WSAB Recommendation #5:** Describe the potential impact investor-owned utilities (IOU) public safety power shutoff (PSPS) events could have on POU customers and how the POU manages these impacts. For POUs that are also balancing authorities, describe the criteria for wildfire related de-energizations. Responses shall only provide aggregated information that does not provide customer-specific information or other potentially sensitive data.

***POU Response:*** NPUA’s customers are unlikely to be directly impacted by an IOU PSPS event because NPUA is not located in the same balancing authority area as the IOUs. NPUA is located within the Western Area Lower Colorado (WALC) balancing authority area and so would be unaffected by a PSPS event of any IOU.

**WSAB Recommendation #6:** Describe the utility customer communication plans with respect to wildfires and PSPS, and in particular describe the methods, content and timing used to communicate with the most vulnerable customers, such as Access and Functional Needs (AFN) customers, medical baseline customers, non-English speakers, and those at risk of losing water or telecommunications service.

***POU Response:*** As described above, NPUA is located in a different balancing authority area than California’s IOUs and is therefore unlikely to be impacted by an IOU PSPS event. Further, due to the predominately desert topography, the wildfire risk in NPUA’s service territory is low. Therefore, it is unlikely that NPUA would proactively deenergize its system as a wildfire mitigation strategy. NPUA has not developed any additional communication plan beyond the existing protocols used during a power outage.

## The Grid

**WSAB Recommendation #7:** Provide details on each POU’s system hardening and grid design programs, including: (1) the goals of the programs and the risk any particular program is designed to mitigate; (2) approach to PSPS mitigation and prevention; and (3) identify any resource shortages.

***POU Response:*** NPUA meets or exceeds all applicable design, construction, and maintenance requirements for its distribution facilities, including CPUC General Orders 95, 128, and 165. Further, NPUA monitors local conditions to determine if increased inspections or other mitigation measures are necessary. As described above, due to the low risk of an IOU PSPS event affecting any NPUA customers, NPUA has not adopted any special PSPS-related mitigation measures. Finally, NPUA has no resource shortages that impact the wildfire risks associated with NPUA’s electric system.

**WSAB Recommendation #8:** Describe annual visual patrols on potentially impacted circuits and the risks the POU is inspecting for. Describe whether and how system inspections lead to system improvements. Describe line patrols before, during, and/or after a critical fire weather event, such as a Red Flag Warning with strong winds, or following a fire that burned in areas where electric facilities are or could have been impacted.

***POU Response:*** NPUA staff routinely perform line patrols and maintain line clearance.

**WSAB Recommendation #9:** Describe options considered by POU (including through the joint efforts of the POU associations) to identify previously unidentified risks that could lead to catastrophic wildfires.

***POU Response:*** The California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA) will be holding a special meeting of its Wildfire Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Working Group this fall, which will be focused on risk drivers for power-line caused catastrophic wildfires and innovative mitigation options. CMUA plans to invite a broad range of utility staff, state agency staff (including the WSAB), industry experts, and academics to participate in this discussion.  As part of this meeting, the working group will discuss unidentified wildfire risk drivers and mitigation measures that could address these risks. Based on the input provided during this meeting, CMUA will produce a publicly-available, post-meeting report that summarizes the group’s conclusions and recommendations.  NPUA’s staff will participate in CMUA’s meeting and will discuss any changes that NPUA has made to its operations in response to the conclusions and recommendations of the working group in a future WMP.

## Risk Assessment

**WSAB Recommendation #10:** Describe the particular wildfire risks associated with system design and construction such as topography and location near the HFTD areas of another utility’s service territory. Describe any G.O. 95 exempt assets and possible updates to G.O. 95 that could facilitate more resilient utility transmission and distribution assets.

***POU Response:***NPUA’s service territory is predominately desert and urban, with a small amount of agricultural land. This topography generally presents a very low risk of wildfire. Further, the City of Needles is approximately 100 miles away from any part of Tier 2 or Tier 3 of the CPUC’s High Fire Threat District. The primary risk of a wildfire within NPUA’s service territory is from marsh wetlands located in Arizona 1.4 miles away. Finally, NPUA has not sought an exemption from GO 95 for any of its assets.

## SITUATIONAL AWARENESS TECHNOLOGY

**WSAB Recommendation #11:** Provide context-setting information about the prevailing wind directions and speeds, differentiated by season, along with average weather conditions by season. Describe how and why situational awareness technology is installed, and where on the system. Describe the decision-making process regarding the installation of situational awareness technology, including constraints such as budgets, availability of equipment, knowledge to effectively deploy, or qualified personnel to install and monitor effectively. Identify any other agencies, utilities, or fire professionals that the data from these devices is shared with.

***POU Response:*** The City of Needles is located in a low elevation region of the Mojave Desert. Wind speed and direction varies by season. From the beginning of March through early July, hourly average wind speeds are typically around 9 miles per hour. For the remainder of the year, wind speeds are typically slower, averaging 7.6 miles per hour. For most of the year (February through November), wind predominately comes from the west. However, for December and January, the wind predominately comes from the east.

## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

**WSAB Recommendation #12:** Describe treatment plans for all types of vegetation associated with utility infrastructure, from the ground to the sky, which includes vegetation above and below electrical lines.

***POU Response:*** NPUA’s vegetation management program is discussed in Section IV.G of NPUA’s WMP. NPUA does not have any part of its service territory that overlaps with or is near the CPUC’s High Fire Threat District and so does not have any different vegetation management requirements for these high fire risk areas. NPUA’s vegetation management program is based on both complying with all applicable standards as well as incorporating specialized knowledge of local growing conditions and tree species.

**WSAB Recommendation #13:** List the qualifications of any experts relied upon, such as scientific experts in ecology, fire ecology, fire behavior, geology, and meteorology. Specify the level of expertise of the POU staff that manages the contractors performing vegetation management. Describe measures each POU takes to ensure that POU staff and contractors comply with or verify compliance with Cal/OSHA standards on Minimum Approach Distances (MAD).

***POU Response:*** The NPUA has partnered with San Bernardino Fire to review the utility’s wildfire plan. All wildfire preventive maintenance and patrol is completed by NPUA staff who have been trained on proper compliance requirements for vegetation.

**WSAB Recommendation #14:** Describe whether the POU has considered innovative and alternative approaches to vegetation management.

***POU Response:*** Due to the low risk of wildfires in NPUA’s service territory, NPUA has not developed any alternate approaches to vegetation management. s

1. This data shall be based on the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, California Multi-Source Vegetation Layer Map, depicting WHR13 Types (Wildlife Habitat Relationship classes grouped into 13 major land cover types) *available at*: <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=b7ec5d68d8114b1fb2bfbf4665989eb3>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This data shall be based on the definitions and maps maintained by the United States Department of Agriculture, as most recently assembled in *The 2010 Wildland-Urban Interface of the Conterminous United States*, *available at* <https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/rmap/rmap_nrs8.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)