

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Plan

This Plan analyses the risk posed to people and property in Sonoma County by earthquakes, landslides, floods, and wildland fires, and presents a list of mitigation actions that the County can implement prior to such events to reduce the personal harm and property damage caused by them. This Plan represents the County's commitment to pre-disaster mitigation, prevention and preparation. It helps fulfill the County's regulatory obligations as established by law and serves as a guide for decision makers as they commit resources to reduce the impacts of such hazards. It also serves as the basis for the State and/or Federal government to provide technical and financial assistance for mitigation programs and projects.

Hazard Mitigation is defined as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long term risk to human life and property. Mitigation can reduce the enormous cost of disasters to property owners and all levels of government. In addition, it can protect critical community facilities, reduce exposure to liability, and minimize community disruption. In the past, emergency management has focused primarily on responding after the fact to disasters. Recent changes in Federal policy resulting from escalating disaster costs and passage of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) have given new impetus to hazard mitigation planning. Under the DMA 2000, the County of Sonoma is required to have a FEMA-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan to be eligible for certain pre- and post-disaster mitigation funds. This document fulfills FEMA requirements and provides direction and guidance on implementing hazard mitigation in Sonoma County. Adoption of the Plan by the County Board of Supervisors and approval by FEMA qualifies Sonoma County to obtain federal assistance for hazard mitigation.

The primary purpose of this plan is to identify community policies, actions and tools for implementation over the long-term, that will result in a reduction in risk and potential for future losses community wide. This is accomplished by using a systematic process of learning about the hazards that can affect the County, setting clear goals, identifying and implementing appropriate actions, and keeping the plan current. This plan is an integral part of the County's multi-pronged approach to minimizing personal injury and property damage from natural disasters, and it complements other planning documents and regulatory authorities governing pre-disaster land use planning and post-disaster response and recovery. It also acknowledges the numerous financial, regulatory and compliance issues government faces on a daily basis. It is intended to set the tone for the implementation of hazard mitigation practices that will build a disaster resistant and sustainable community. This plan covers those areas within the unincorporated portions of Sonoma County.

No amount of planning or mitigation can prevent disasters from occurring or eliminate the risk and impacts of such events altogether. Natural disasters will continue to occur. This Plan seeks to identify where the County can take reasonable actions to minimize the adverse effects and dangers from these disaster events before they occur. Though the County will take actions to increase readiness to respond to such events and/or reduce the potential for damage and harm from such events, the potential for significant harm and damage arising from natural disasters remains. Therefore each individual has a responsibility to be aware of the potential hazards where they live and to do what they can as an individual to minimize their own

household's vulnerability to such events. The County Department of Emergency Services website includes a variety of resources and links for further information.

## **1.2 Community Profile**

Sonoma County, the northernmost of the nine counties comprising the San Francisco Bay area, is located along the Pacific coastline about 40 miles north of San Francisco. The county is bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west, Marin County and San Pablo Bay to the south, Solano, Napa, and Lake Counties to the east, and Mendocino County to the north.

Sonoma County had a total population of 472,700 as of January 2004. Approximately one-third of county residents reside in the unincorporated areas of the county, including the communities of Annapolis, Bodega, Bodega Bay, Cazadero, Duncans Mills, Forestville, Fort Ross, Geyserville, Glen Ellen, Graton, Guerneville, Kenwood, Jenner, Monte Rio, Occidental, Salmon Creek, and Sea Ranch. The remaining two-thirds of the population reside in the incorporated cities and towns of Cloverdale, Cotati, Healdsburg, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Sonoma, and Windsor.

Sonoma County has 1,510 square miles of land, not including 78 square miles of which lie within the nine incorporated jurisdictions. Approximately half of Sonoma County falls within the land use category of Resources and Rural Development, which includes low-density areas devoted to timberland and natural resources. Approximately 15 percent of the County is categorized as developed. The economic base of the unincorporated County is largely tourism and agriculture.

Sonoma County's topography varies from the mountainous border with Napa County in the east to rolling hills and grasslands along the Pacific Coast. The Santa Rosa plain, the dominant feature in central Sonoma County, consists of farms, orchards, vineyards, and the expanding urban area of Santa Rosa. The Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek valleys, which are also agricultural but gradually urbanizing, lie southeast of Santa Rosa and drain into San Pablo Bay. The hills and valleys of the north, including the narrow Russian River valley, are covered by redwood and mixed conifer forests.

The diverse geology, topography, and hydrology of the County contribute to its physical beauty and rural quality. However, these same elements contribute significantly to its vulnerability to natural hazards.