



STAFF REPORT

CITY OF SOLANA BEACH

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
FROM: Alyssa Muto, City Manager
MEETING DATE: May 7, 2025
ORIGINATING DEPT: Fire Department - Josh Gordon, Fire Chief
SUBJECT: **City Council Presentation of New Cal Fire Hazard Severity Zones**

BACKGROUND:

Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps arose from major destructive fires, prompting the recognition of these areas and strategies to reduce wildfire risks. Legislative response led to mandated mapping across California under the California Public Resources Code 4201-4204. FHSZ maps evaluate “hazard”, not “risk”. “Hazard” is based on the physical conditions that create a likelihood and expected fire behavior over a 30 to 50-year period without considering mitigation measures such as home hardening, recent wildfire, or fuel reduction efforts. “Risk” is the potential damage a fire can do to the area under existing conditions, accounting for any modifications such as fuel reduction projects, defensible space, and ignition resistant building construction.

On March 24, 2025, Cal Fire finalized and publicly released the updated FHSZ maps (Attachment 1) for Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs), including Solana Beach. These maps are the most current, science-based state assessment of wildfire hazards. Cal Fire’s mapping uses modern fire behavior models, historical fire data, topography, vegetation, areas prone to wildfire, weather patterns, and climate trends. Local jurisdictions have 120 days from the release of the FSHZ maps to adopt the map and make adjustments to the appropriate local ordinances.

This is an informational item for City Council and the public. Staff will bring a subsequent item for City Council consideration to adopt the map and amend the associated ordinances at a future meeting.

CITY COUNCIL ACTION:

DISCUSSION:

Solana Beach, like much of coastal California, is facing the reality that wildfire risk is no longer limited to the traditional wildland-urban interface or rural areas. Climate change, extended drought, invasive vegetation, and periodic strong winds (Santa Ana events) have expanded the City's vulnerability. The new FHSZ boundaries reflect these modern hazards and are intended to drive both public awareness and City policy toward more aggressive risk reduction.

The new FHSZ maps have updated identified hazards of both the High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Areas previously not identified in the FHSZ, particularly neighborhoods adjacent to open space, the San Elijo Lagoon, hillside properties, and the city's eastern edges, are now subject to wildfire safety standards.

These new designations directly affect local building codes, require enhanced defensible space (clearing brush and maintaining safe zones around structures), and trigger additional disclosure obligations for property owners. Any new construction in Very High and High Fire Hazard Severity Zones must comply with Chapter 7A of the California Building Code (wildfire-resistant construction standards) and the Government Code 51175-51189 (defensible space regulations).

Adoption of Cal Fire's updated FHSZ maps follows a defined legal and administrative process, which directly affects how and when local government must comply with new regulatory requirements.

State-Level Adoption

Cal Fire finalized and publicly released the updated FHSZ maps for Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs) on March 24, 2025. According to Government Code 51178, cities must incorporate these maps into their local planning and regulatory frameworks within a set timeframe after official adoption.

VHFSZ Map Information

The VHFSZ Map for the City of Solana Beach has changed significantly. The 2009 VHFSZ Map previously included properties along and/or adjacent to the City's northern boundary and was approximately 0.55 square miles in area and included approximately 670 housing units. The 2025 VHFSZ Map (Attachment 1) for Solana Beach covers approximately 0.43 square miles which is a reduction in area of approximately 28% from the 2009 VHFSZ Map (Attachment 2) and is primarily limited to the northeastern quadrant of the City. The 2025 VHFSZ map now includes both High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, where the 2009 VHFSZ map only included the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. There are approximately 560 housing units (227 units in High, 333 units in Very High) within the 2025 VHFSZ map, which is about 16% less housing units than the 2009 VHFSZ map.

City-Level Actions and Deadlines

Building Code and Ordinance Updates:

Upon the state's final map publication, the City of Solana Beach is legally required to update its local ordinances, zoning codes, and development standards to reflect the new FHSZ designations. All new construction, significant remodels, and certain repairs within the designated High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones must comply with Chapter 7A of the California Building Code (CBC) and associated local codes. These updates are required within 120 days of the state's final map publication.

Defensible Space Enforcement:

The City must also update its defensible space enforcement policies to align with the newly identified FHSZs. Inspections and enforcement actions under Government Code 51182 must commence within the same 120-day window.

Enforcement and Compliance Timeline

Government Code Sec. 51179 states the adoption and implementation process must be completed within 120 days of the state's map certification to ensure all local codes, enforcement programs, and public communications are fully updated and operational. Delays in adoption may expose the city to legal risks, limit eligibility for certain state grants, and impede insurance availability for residents.

The updated maps and related regulations place new responsibilities on the cities for public education, enforcement, evacuation planning, and emergency response. The City will need to coordinate between departments, increase outreach to affected neighborhoods, and ensure compliance to reduce the likelihood and impact of future wildfires.

The City must complete all required ordinance and policy updates no later than 120 days from Cal Fire's March 24, 2025 final map publication date, which would be a deadline of July 22, 2025. Staff will return to City Council with draft ordinance language and an implementation timeline to ensure Solana Beach meets all legal requirements and minimizes community risk.

CEQA COMPLIANCE STATEMENT:

N/A

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no current fiscal impact of this information. The implementation of updated ordinances triggered by this information would be at a cost of Staff time.

WORK PLAN:

This item is consistent with Item A.1 (General Plan Updates) of the Community Character Priorities of the FY 2024/25 Work Plan.

OPTIONS:

- Receive presentation on the New Fire Hazard Severity Zone map and required timelines.

CITY STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council receive this presentation on the new Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones and High Fire Hazard Severity Zones with the mandated adoption timelines.



For Alyssa Muto, City Manager

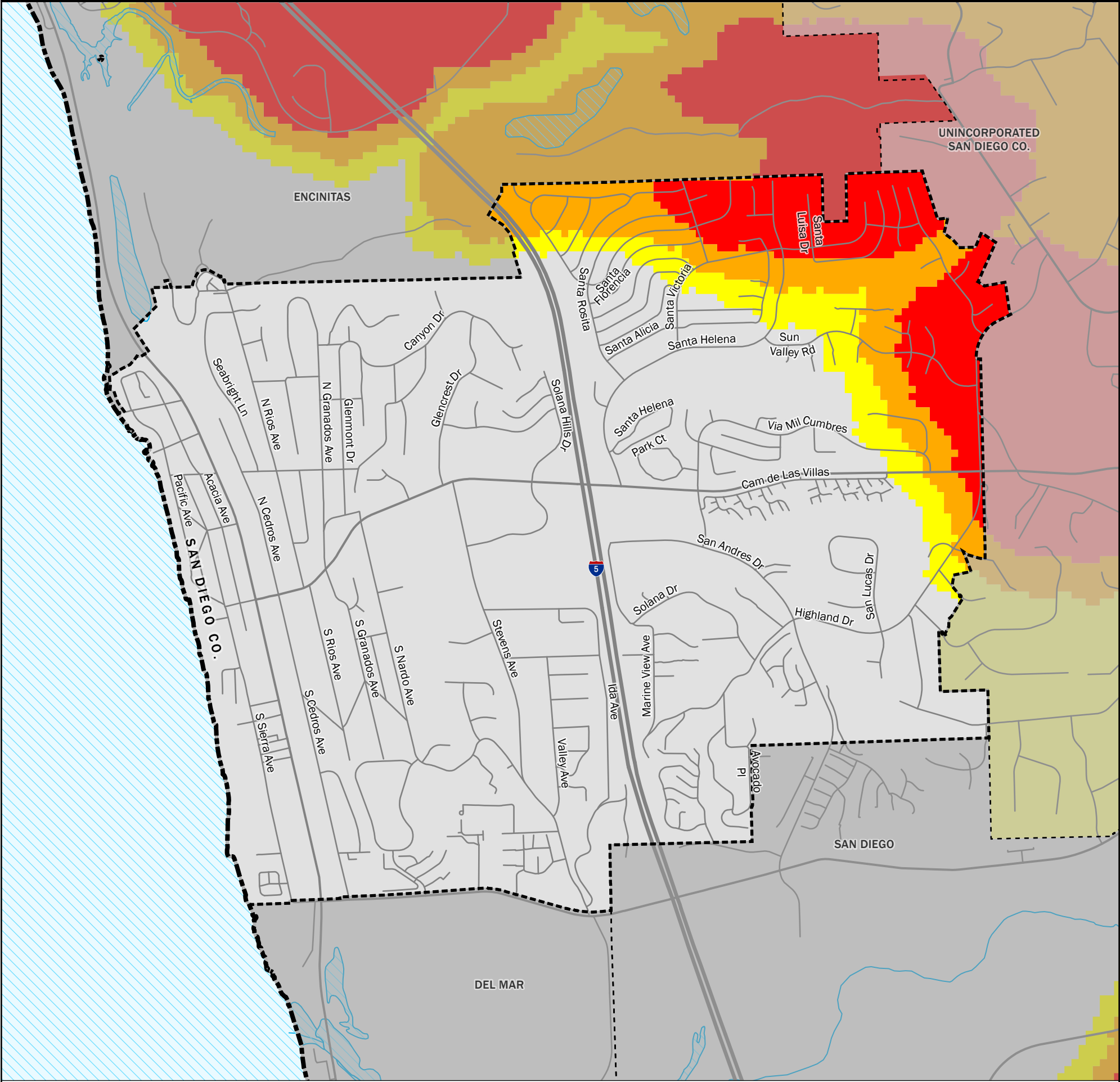
Attachments:

1. 2025 Solana Beach Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map
2. 2009 Solana Beach Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map



Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones

As Identified by the
State Fire Marshal
March 24, 2025

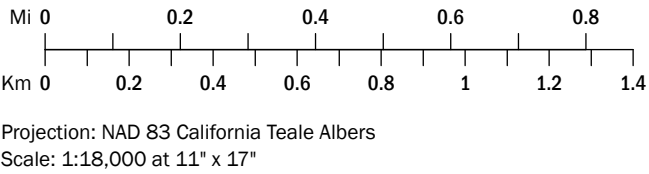


Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) in Local Responsibility Area (LRA), as Identified by the State Fire Marshal

Very High High Moderate

Fire Hazard Severity Zones in State Responsibility Area (SRA), Effective April 1, 2024

Very High High Moderate



Incorporated City Waterbody
Unzoned LRA

ATTACHMENT 1

Government Code section 51178 requires the State Fire Marshal to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. Moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones shall be based on fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant factors including areas where winds have been identified by the Office of the State Fire Marshal as a major cause of wildfire spread.

The State of California and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection make no representations or warranties regarding the accuracy of data or maps. Neither the State nor the Department shall be liable under any circumstances for any direct, special, incidental, or consequential damages with respect to any claim by any user or third party on account of, or arising from, the use of data or maps.

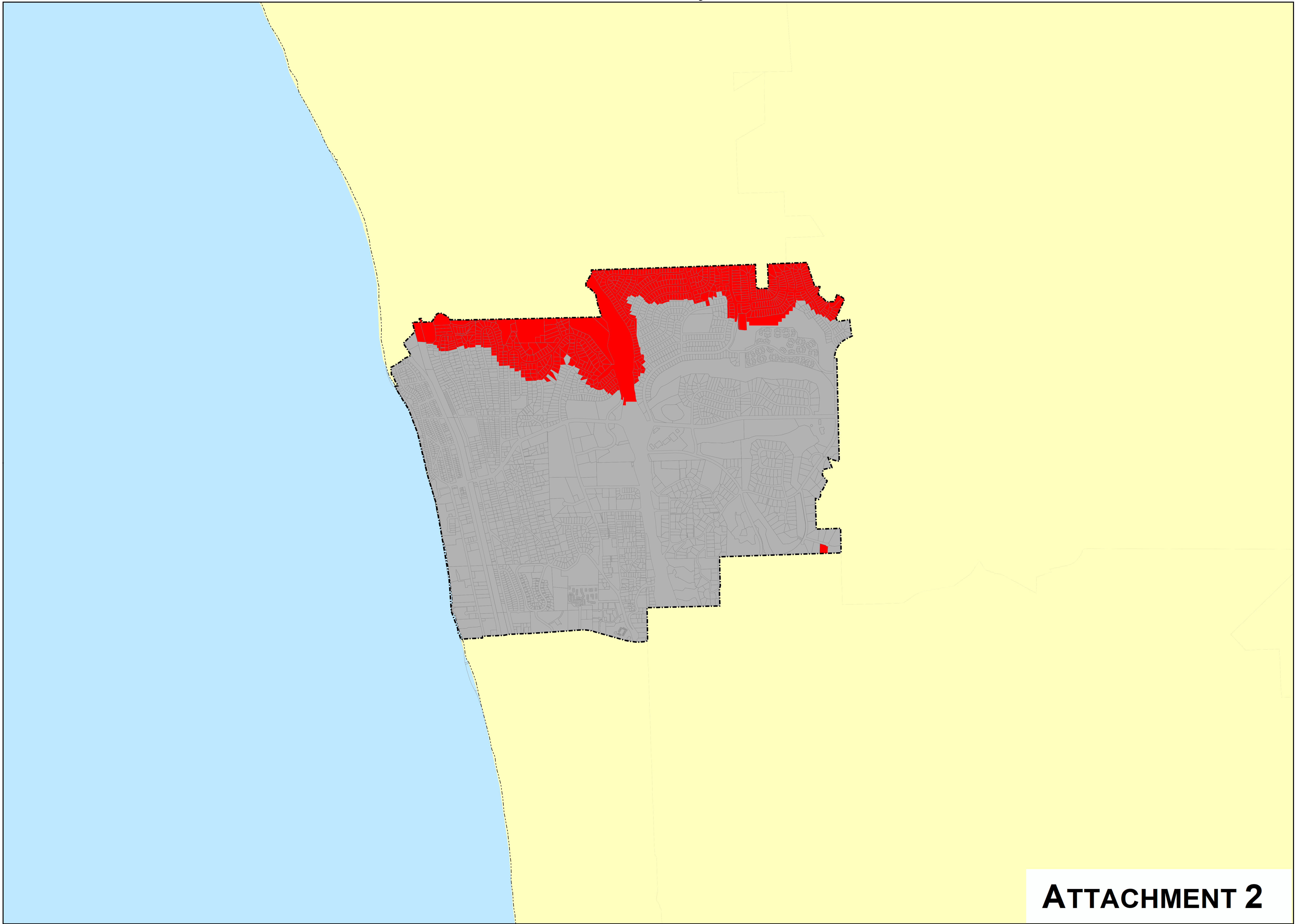
Gavin Newsom, Governor, State of California
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary for Natural Resources, CA Natural Resources Agency
Joe Tyler, Director/Fire Chief, CA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Daniel Berlant, State Fire Marshal, CA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Data Sources:
CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZSRA23_3, FHSZLRA_25_1)
CAL FIRE State Responsibility Areas (SRA25_1)
City and County boundaries as of 10/22/24 (CA Board of Equalization)



Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in LRA

As Recommended by CAL FIRE



ATTACHMENT 2

Government Document CA 51118-B describes the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to identify and map the potential for high fire hazard severity zones (HFSZs) in California. The HFSZs are based on data and models of **potential** fuels over a 30-year time horizon and their associated expected fire behavior, and expected burn probabilities to quantify the likelihood of a wildfire occurring in the area. The HFSZs are based on a methodology that is described in the CAL FIRE methodology can be found at http://hazarc.ca.gov/hazarc/docs/hazarc_methods.htm. Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) are defined by the CAL FIRE methodology and are used to map the HFSZs. The HFSZs are used to map the HFSZs and are used to map the HFSZs. The HFSZs are used to map the HFSZs and are used to map the HFSZs.

In late 2005 to be effective in 2006, the California Building Commission adopted California Building Code Chapter 7A, which requires that all new buildings be constructed in accordance with the California Building Code Chapter 7A. This includes provisions to improve the ignition resistance of buildings, especially from firebrands. The updated very high fire hazard severity zones (VHFHSZs) are based on the CAL FIRE methodology and are used to map the HFSZs. The HFSZs are used to map the HFSZs and are used to map the HFSZs.

This specific map was created on a geographic information system dataset that depicts final CAL FIRE recommendations for very high HFSZs within the local jurisdiction. The process of finalizing these boundaries involved an extensive local CAL FIRE review and a public comment period. The map is based on the CAL FIRE methodology and is used to map the HFSZs. The HFSZs are used to map the HFSZs and are used to map the HFSZs.

Projection Albers, NAD 1983
Scale 1: 12,000
at 36" x 36"
June 11, 2009

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor,
State of California
Mike Chrisman, Secretary for Resources,
The Natural Resources Agency
Del Walters, Director,
Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

MAP ID: FHSZL_c37_SolanaBeach

DATA SOURCES
CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZL06_3)