Fire has brought you here, its complexity is mesmerizing and its unyielding power can be destructive; however the shared concern for your personal, your family's and your community's wellbeing is what bonds you with other residents involved in this exercise.

The discourse surrounding fire has historically been one-sided, cast solely as a destructive force that must be contained at all costs. Words such as disastrous, hellscape, and monstrous have been used historically to reinforce the dominant narrative that 'fire is bad'. This fails to tell the complete story of fire as a complex process that is necessary for ecological and cultural benefit. The negative effects of this has become increasingly apparent in recent decades, and as residents of the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) your community is at the forefront of fire risk. At the same time, you are in the position to be drivers of change in the fire conversation. As inhabitants of the WUI, you have an acute awareness of the urgency for effective fire planning as well as a unique understanding of your landscape.

The mission of Spark Change is to provide your community with tools to explore your personal narratives of fire and use this language to expand the conversation while creating a comprehensive and thorough Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). By augmenting the existing exercise framework outlined in the CWPP Outreach and Engagement handbook, Spark Change leverages your community's place-based knowledge to create a detailed CWPP that builds present day community ties while ensuring future generations inherit space that is resilient. Upon completion of the exercise, you will have a visual artifact that tells a story unique to your community. This map is intended to be hung and used as a guide for the change that has been agreed upon. It is meant to serve as a reminder and a checklist, constantly being updated as progress is made or as conditions shift.

Changing how we live with fire requires changing the narrative, and this begins with the words that we choose.

Holden Tal
Sustainable Environmental Design
Independent Senior Project
Class of 2026

Spark Change

Fire, Language + Engagement
in California's Wildland-Urban Interface

1 SHARE

Item: Cards of four themes supported by ten adjectives

Instruction: This exercise works in tandem with the engagement portion outlined in the CWPP handbook. Through this exercise you will share your personal language and work towards building a common fire lexicon within your group which will become the foundation for cooperative action. This will improve the CWPP by daylighting additional perspectives, experiences and assets to leverage in wildfire preparedness work. In this context, inclusivity means acknowledging and involving people from various backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints.

Lay out the cards and with your group take turns reading off the word on the card as well as the theme. Are these words that you have used to describe your surroundings? Open the discussion with your co-creators to find what words you share and which words may be new to your fire vocabulary.

2 LOCATE

Item: Aerial photograph with city boundaries emphasized

Instructions: Maps tell stories and they are reflections of the map's creators. As with language they can be used to limit or expand the conversation. Now that the words have been organized, we will go ahead and use them on our map. After you and your group have become familiar with the themes and words of the cards, use them to describe areas in your environment that you see on the map. Can the landforms be described with the adjectives under Land? How has smoke settled in low lying areas before? Once the cards have been exhausted, the result will be a map that has a story that can only be told through local knowledge.

ENVISION 3

Item: High visibility string used to delineate areas of concern

Instruction: At this point, you have identified common language and developed a new fire vocabulary unique to your community. You have also begun to map this vocabulary on your own landscape, focusing on smoke, land, plants, and the fire itself. In doing this, you have identified areas of security and comfort alongside areas of concern. The final step in this workshop is an extension of the CWPP's Visioning Exercise. Here is an opportunity for the community to come together to discuss and reflect on the work they have done by identifying areas that may need more attention in the coming years. These may be areas where the cards are clustered, showing spaces that might need to be prioritized in the the upcoming planning process. Please use the provided pins and orange string to highlight these areas.