

# IGNITING SOLUTIONS:

## What Can OC Learn from the LA Wildfires

### I N R E V I E W

**Thank you for attending the Igniting Solutions event hosted by UCI CUSP and the UCI School of Social Ecology on May 9th!**

The UCI Climate and Urban Sustainability Program (CUSP) and the School of Social Ecology are continuing their collaboration to enhance wildfire awareness and action across Orange County, alongside community partners.

Stay connected through <https://sites.uci.edu/cusp/>, where post-event updates and actionable resources will be shared in Summer 2025.

Additionally, the School of Social Ecology is launching its Social Impact Hub, further expanding opportunities for community and policy engagement and meaningful change. Subscribe to the School's newsletter at <https://socialecology.uci.edu/signup> for future updates.

**You can view event highlights and all recordings at this [link](#).**

**If you have any questions, please contact Alexandria Aubley at [aaubly@uci.edu](mailto:aaubly@uci.edu).**

#### **Key Event Takeaways:**

- 1. Addressing risk mitigation/development paradox** - Can we take advantage of this window of opportunity to develop and/or rebuild sustainably?
- 2. Improving effective communication of science** - How can we support science and better connect it to efficient decision making and outreach locally?
- 3. Supporting vulnerable groups** - How Can We Better Inform and Prepare Those Most Impacted by Wildfires?

**Key points from individual speakers can be found on the following pages.**



**UC Irvine** School of Social Ecology



### **Dr. James Randerson | UCI**

Randerson's analysis shows that winter rains of at least 2 inches significantly reduce Santa Ana wind wildfire risk. To better prepare LA and OC, he proposes a Santa Ana wind classification system—like the hurricane scale—based on wind speed, duration, humidity, and shrub moisture to assess fire danger.

### **Madison Killibrew | Irvine Ranch Conservancy**

Killebrew highlights the importance of community engagement in fire prevention. The IRC's firewatch program deploys trained volunteers during red flag warnings to monitor high fire risk areas in Orange County.



### **Dr. Brett Sanders | UCI**

The US would benefit from more accurate data on what's at risk when disasters hit. This would provide a more efficient response to awareness, mitigation, and insurance strategies. Sanders' team is building reliable data sets for a better understanding of disaster hazards and impacts.

### **Dr. Mike Mendez | UCI**

In a climate-changing world, we must focus assistance on disadvantaged groups as climate disasters exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. To support immigrant populations, including those in wildfire-prone LA and OC, Mendez notes that community disaster assistance programs are key to providing aid and support.



### **Dr. Suellen Hopfer | UCI**

Wildfire smoke affects communities far beyond the burn area, creating widespread health impacts that can be fought through various strategies including home improvements. Hopfer also makes the point that establishing widespread evacuation alerts and mapping evacuation routes are necessary for community fire preparedness.





### **Dr. Doug Houston | UCI**

After wildfires, communities in the wildland urban interface (WUI) are vulnerable to compounding environmental disasters. Root structures of vegetation are lost in fires, increasing the risk of floods and mudslides. Houston and his team are exploring the relationship between wildfires and flooding, and how compounding disasters and risk perception affect communities.

### **Julie Coffey | UCI Nature**

Coffey and her team are exploring ways to reduce fire risk in Orange County while maintaining habitat value. Establishing more fuel modification zones by planting native, moist plants in the WUI can prevent wildfire ignition and spread in both OC and LA.



### **Chief Nick Freeman | Orange County Fire Authority**

As a first responder to the Palisades Fire, Chief Freeman emphasized that strong winds, limited community access, and insufficient resources hindered firefighting ability. To improve effective response, OCFA focuses on community fire prevention and outreach. Strategies include establishing fuel modification zones and encouraging home hardening.

### **Dr. Nicola Ulibarri | UCI**

After identifying key shortcomings in Los Angeles' wildfire preparedness and response, Ulibarri highlights three major fire policy and planning gaps in OC: a lower number of firefighters per capita, reliance on groundwater, which limits water availability and access, and insufficient fire preparedness in urban areas.



### **Francisco Sanchez | Former Associate Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration's ODR&R**

Sanchez was on site during the LA fires, overseeing disaster relief efforts by coordinating resource allocation, prioritizing local needs, and engaging directly with affected residents to address their concerns. He encouraged thoughtful programs like those offered by the SBA in order to rebuild sustainably.