

Building Resilience in Napa: Climate Summit Highlights Local Action

By Chris Benz

From fire resilience and wetlands protection to innovative energy storage and composting, Napa's fourth annual Climate Summit will feature inspirational stories about steps being taken locally to make our community safer in a changing climate. One such story is that of Cori Carlson and the Valley Stewards Initiative.

The 2020 Glass Fire was a life-changing moment for Carlson, owner of Napa Pasture Protein in Capell Valley. She saw that the fire had burned around, rather than through, the areas grazed by her sheep. Oak trees within the grazed areas survived, whereas 75-80% of the trees in the non-grazed areas died.

"I realized my daughters, the sixth generation of our ranching family, wouldn't know the ranch as I knew it, with its towering oaks, if I didn't do something," she said.

Carlson made a career change and began putting her herds of sheep and goats to work grazing for wildfire mitigation. Her herds now help create and maintain enhanced resilience sites, including one on Glass Mountain, as part of the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (Napa Firewise) Valley Stewards Initiative. This program brings neighbors together to create defensible zones in strategically identified locations prioritized by CAL FIRE and Napa County Fire. Sites are developed for improved response, combining fuel treatment areas, forest health, water storage, access, and fire-ready infrastructure. Once completed, they are integrated into Tablet Command, a digital wildfire response platform used by all frontline fire personnel in Napa County.

"Fire is a unique peril in that we are only as resilient as our neighbor. We are proving that the community has power over our fuels, over our response, and over our future," said Joe Nordlinger, CEO of Napa Firewise. "This is how we begin to shift from crisis to control."

The Valley Stewards Initiative is one of the innovative programs to be presented at this year's Climate Summit under the banner, "Resilient Napa." The summit will take place on Thursday, March 26, from 3 to 6 p.m. at the Napa Valley College Performing Arts Center, and is free to the public. It is co-hosted by Napa Climate NOW! and Napa Valley College.

"Building resilience locally to climate threats is more important than ever," explained Napa City Councilmember Beth Painter, a member of the Climate Summit planning team. "There are exciting resilience efforts throughout Napa County, and we want to make sure residents know what's happening and how to participate."

Summit attendees will learn about the Napa County Resource Conservation District (RCD) programs to re-establish wetlands, which serve as buffers for flooding and sea level rise. The RCD will also describe the newly-formed Napa River Watershed Group, a collaborative focused on restoring creeks and collectively managing our local water supplies.

Summit sponsor Pacific Gas and Electric will provide an update on its approach to resiliency and wildfire mitigation, including the electric undergrounding program.

Other ground-breaking projects in the program include: the Calistoga Resiliency Center, a hydrogen-fueled battery energy storage system that provides 48 hours of continuous power to Calistoga during Public Safety Power Shutoff events; an upcoming organic-waste-to-energy project for the City of Napa; and a fresh take on the extraordinary value of composting through Total Climate Accounting.

Javier Montalbo from MCE Clean Energy will discuss MCE's workforce training programs to help both professional contractors and young people interested in the trades gain skills in new clean energy technologies.

The Summit concludes with a social hour featuring Napa Valley College wines, where attendees can network with local organizations such as the UC Master Gardeners, Napa Recycling, and the Community Foundation, and discover different approaches to creating resilience in our community.

Whether you're a resident, landowner, business owner, student, or simply someone who cares about Napa's future, this Summit offers a practical look at how climate resilience is being built locally. It's an opportunity to learn what's already underway and how individual actions connect to broader community efforts.

For more information, go to <https://napa.350bayarea.org/event/2026-napa-climate-summit-resiliency>.

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Napa Climate NOW! is a local nonprofit citizens' group advocating for smart climate solutions based on the latest climate science, part of 350 Bay Area.

Info, napa.350bayareorg



Photo credit: Cori Carlson

Photo caption: Cori Carlson's herd hard at work on wildfire mitigation