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## **COUNTY OF MENDOCINO**

### **Office Of The Sheriff-Coroner**

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## **SURE-UP: Strengthening, Upfitting and Resilience in Rural Law Enforcement: USDA Grant for Protection**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office (MSCO) operates in a geographically diverse and expansive rural region. Rural law enforcement faces increasing challenges due to various factors, including a growing demand for emergency responses following some of California's largest wildfires<sup>1</sup>, a significantly high rate of opioid-related overdoses<sup>2</sup> compared to both state and national averages, and the inherent challenges of accessing remote communities.

Despite having limited resources, the MSCO is committed to addressing the diverse needs of its community. To effectively meet these challenges, the Sheriff's Office is seeking additional funding to acquire and equip two specialized law enforcement vehicles for the Redwood Valley area.

### **ABOUT MENDOCINO COUNTY**

Mendocino County, in rural Northern California, spans 3,500 square miles, larger than the state of Delaware, and is primarily rural, with a population density of approximately 26.1 per square mile<sup>3</sup>. Mendocino County has 91,601 residents<sup>4</sup>, 19 unincorporated communities, 9 Native American reservations and 4 incorporated cities. It is considered a low-income community using the definition of low-income communities as an application jurisdiction (community, county, or tribal area) that has less than 80% of the median household income of its state. Per census data, the median household income in the county is \$65,520<sup>5</sup>. Against the median household incomes of the State of California

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<sup>1</sup> #1 August Complex, #3 Mendocino Complex, [Top 20 Largest CA Wildfires.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> (41.3/100,000 vs 16.5/100,000 in California vs. 23.5/100,000 in US) [HealthyMendocino.org](#)

<sup>3</sup> US Census - <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/mendocinocountycalifornia/EDU685222>

<sup>4</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>5</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

(\$91,551<sup>6</sup>) Mendocino County makes up 71% of the state average. Additionally, according to the CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index, Mendocino County scores 0.9726<sup>7</sup> which indicates a high level of vulnerability.

FEMA's National Risk Index positions Mendocino County in the 95.1 national percentile<sup>8</sup>, identifying it as having "very high" social vulnerability. Among hazard type risk ratings, the County scores highest for wildfire (97.3), drought (99.4), earthquake (98.4), landslide (99.5), and riverine flooding (96.0). Per the CWDG Data Tool, Mendocino County, CA, meets the "wildfire hazard potential" criteria and has a higher wildfire hazard potential than 93.2% of counties in the nation.<sup>9</sup> According to the most recent CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps (June 2023), the majority of Mendocino County has a high or very high wildfire hazard potential which amounts to over 1.5 million acres<sup>10</sup>.

Over the past decade, Mendocino County has experienced four fire-related disasters proclaimed by the governor of California. The County has also been affected by California's first and third-largest wildfires on record<sup>11</sup>. Recent wildfires include the Ranch and River Fires in 2018, the Redwood Fire in 2017, the North Pass Fire in 2012, the August Complex Fire in 2020, and the extensive Mendocino Lightning Complex Fire in 2008. The Mendocino Lightning Complex burned 54,817 acres, caused \$48.5 million in damages, and led to the destruction of both a residence and an outbuilding, injuring 47 people in the process.

Ensuring public safety in the dispersed, rural terrain of Mendocino County presents a daily challenge for the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office. The MSCO faces high theft and burglary rates, over 79% of all reported crimes in 2020<sup>12</sup>, especially in isolated areas where homes and businesses are vulnerable. One significant concern is drug-related behavior<sup>13</sup>, which frequently leads to associated crimes, such as theft, trespassing, and violence. Environmental crimes also pose a threat, with illegal dumping and ecological damage commonly linked to illicit cannabis cultivation. Moreover, the isolated nature of rural areas can contribute to violent crimes, including aggravated assault, robbery, rape, and, on rare occasions, homicides<sup>14</sup>. Such incidents necessitate a rapid response from law enforcement to ensure community safety.

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<sup>6</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>7</sup> ATSDR SVI Interactive Map - [SVI Interactive Map | Place and Health - Geospatial Research, Analysis, and Services Program \(GRASP\) | ATSDR](#)

<sup>8</sup> FEMA National Risk Index Map [Map | National Risk Index](#)

<sup>9</sup> Wildfire Risk to Communities. Scott JH, Gilbertson-Day JW, Moran C, Dillon GK, Short KC, & Vogler KC. (2020). Wildfire Risk to Communities: Spatial datasets of landscape-wide wildfire risk components for the United States. Fort Collins, CO: Forest Service Research Data Archive. Updated 25 November 2020. As reported by the CWDG Data Tool, <https://wildfirerisk.org/cwdg-tool/6045>

<sup>10</sup> CalFire Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/what-we-do/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/fire-hazard-severity-zones/fire-hazard-severity-zones-maps-2022>

<sup>11</sup> August & Mendocino Complex. CalFire: Top 20 Largest California Wildfires. [Top 20 Largest CA Wildfires.pdf](#)

<sup>12</sup> 1,412 reported Property crimes/ 79.2%. 2020 Reported Crimes. BSCC Publicly Accessible Data Sets for Mendocino County. [Mendocino-County-Demographic-Reference-Data\\_Feb2022.pdf](#)

<sup>13</sup> Mendocino County's Age-adjusted ED visit Rate due to opioid overdose (excluding heroin) is 88.2 per 100,000 residents (2022) vs. California's 54.9 per 100,000 residents. Healthy Mendocino. [Healthy Mendocino :: Indicators :: Priority Area: Substance Abuse](#)

<sup>14</sup> 371 reported Violent crimes /20.8% of reported crimes. 2020 Reported Crimes. BSCC Publicly Accessible Data Sets for Mendocino County. [Mendocino-County-Demographic-Reference-Data\\_Feb2022.pdf](#)

## ABOUT REDWOOD VALLEY, MENDOCINO COUNTY

Redwood Valley is an unincorporated census-designated place (CDP) covering an area of 2.7 square miles. It is located north of Ukiah, the county seat, and southeast of Willits. The community is home to the headwaters of the West Fork of the Russian River, featuring rolling woodlands, agricultural lands, and rangelands. According to the latest census data, Redwood Valley CDP has a total population of 1,843 residents and 604 households<sup>15</sup>.

Redwood Valley CDP is classified as a low-income community, defined as a jurisdiction (such as a community, county, or tribal area) with a median household income of less than 80% of the state's median household income. The median household income in Redwood Valley CDP is \$53,600<sup>16</sup>, which is 56.1% of the median income for the State of California, which is \$91,551<sup>17</sup>.

Recent wildfire events in Mendocino County, notably the 2017 Redwood Complex Fire—one of California's deadliest wildfires<sup>18</sup>—claimed the lives of 9 people, resulted in 21 serious injuries, and destroyed over 548 structures. This fast-moving blaze burned 36,523 acres in Redwood Valley and nearby Potter Valley. These events underscore the critical importance of swift emergency response in the early stages of a wildfire, as every minute counts.

As a small rural community with scattered homes, agricultural properties, and small businesses, this region experiences high theft rates. The isolation and inadequate security of rural properties make them particularly vulnerable. Similar to other areas in the county, the community faces challenges with opioid abuse, which contribute to crimes such as vandalism and theft. Although less frequent than property crimes, incidents of domestic violence, assault, and occasional shootings have been reported, indicating a need for a swift law enforcement response.

In 2023, the Mendocino County Sheriff's Central A Beat, which encompasses Redwood and Potter Valley, recorded 665 separate law enforcement incidents resulting in 60 arrests and 509 calls for service<sup>19</sup>. As of November 20, 2024, there have been 613 separate law enforcement incidents, with 49 arrests and 636 calls for service.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 2020 Decennial Census/2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>16</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>17</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>18</sup> CalFire: Top 20 Deadliest California Wildfires [Top 20 Deadliest CA Wildfires.pdf](#)

<sup>19</sup> Mendocino County Sheriff's Office Citizen Connect. [CitizenConnect](#)

<sup>20</sup> Mendocino County Sheriff's Office Citizen Connect. [CitizenConnect](#)

1/1/23 - 12/31/23	Law Enforcement Incidents	Arrests	Calls	Total
Central A Beat	665	60	509	1,234
All of Mendocino Co.	11,925	1,629	4,862	18,415
% total incidents for the Co.	5.6%	3.7%	10.5%	6.7%

1/1/24 - 11/20/24	Law Enforcement Incidents	Arrests	Calls	Total
Central A Beat	624	49	676	1,349
All of Mendocino Co.	11,223	1,499	5,444	18,166
% total incidents for the Co.	5.6%	3.3%	12.4%	7.4%

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Grant will facilitate the acquisition and equipping of two new law enforcement vehicles, which will be equipped with advanced emergency response technology, sophisticated communication tools, and essential safety equipment. These vehicles will be strategically deployed in Redwood Valley to enhance patrolling capabilities, respond in the face of emergencies, support rural crime response initiatives, and ensure the MCSO can efficiently and safely access remote areas. Their role in significantly improving response times, especially in the challenging terrain of Mendocino County, will be a crucial resource for safeguarding public safety.

The Sheriff's Office requires reliable and appropriately equipped vehicles to fulfill its multifaceted responsibilities beyond preserving the peace, enforcing criminal statutes, and investigating criminal activity. These specialized vehicles are equally critical during emergencies when the safety of residents is paramount.

During times of crisis, the Sheriff's Office issues public alerts and coordinates evacuation operations. Deputies use their vehicles to disseminate urgent warnings through hi-lo sirens and integrated communication systems, ensuring that residents—especially those in remote areas—receive critical information. They also conduct door-to-door notifications to alert residents of imminent danger and guide them to safety. Additionally, Sheriff vehicles are essential for patrolling neighborhoods, preventing looting, and maintaining public order at designated evacuation sites. The versatility and mobility of these vehicles enable the MCSO to quickly deploy resources, establish control points, and effectively adapt to changing emergency conditions.

By ensuring the availability of well-equipped and reliable vehicles, the Sheriff's Office will enhance its capacity to protect lives and property while fostering a sense of safety and preparedness within the community. This grant will directly support acquiring vehicles necessary for effective law enforcement and emergency management operations.

## STATEMENT OF NEED

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office operates within a substantial jurisdiction encompassing approximately 3,500 square miles, contending with a range of challenges commonly with rural communities. The principal issues are as follows:

1. **Limited Resources and Personnel:** A limited number of deputies cover extensive areas, which can result in prolonged response times, particularly in remote locations. There are limited resources for patrol vehicles, which are critical for covering vast and rugged rural areas.
2. **Aging Fleet of Vehicles:** The MSCO's aging fleet necessitates frequent maintenance, which restricts vehicle availability and adversely affects safety and response efficiency, especially in challenging terrain.
3. **Remote Access Challenges:** Rural communities often have rough, unpaved roads that become increasingly difficult to navigate during wildfire season and severe weather. This can delay emergency responses and lead to significant wear and tear on vehicles due to the challenges of off-road travel and uneven terrains.
4. **High Demand for Emergency Services:** The escalation of emergency calls, driven by factors such as wildfires, opioid overdoses, and property crimes, significantly strains the MSCO's resources.
5. **Inter-Agency Coordination Needs:** Effective collaboration with other agencies necessitates advanced communication systems and dependable equipment, particularly during natural disasters.

Acquiring two updated vehicles fully equipped through the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Grant will enhance the MSCO's ability to maintain public safety throughout the county, improve response times, and lessen the operational burden on aging vehicles.

## PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. **Acquire & Equip Two New Sheriff Vehicles:** purchase two new pursuit-rated vehicles and equip them with advanced emergency response technology, sophisticated communication tools, and essential safety equipment.
2. **Enhance Public Safety in Rural Areas:** Improve response time to incidents and calls for service in Redwood Valley by purchasing, equipping, and deploying two new law enforcement vehicles.
3. **Increase Operational Efficiency:** Minimize downtime and maintenance expenses by replacing aging vehicles, thereby ensuring that deputies are fully equipped for patrol duties, emergency response, and wildfire support.
4. **Support Effective Wildfire and Disaster Response:** Deploy two new vehicles with modern equipment to facilitate rapid notification and evacuation, conduct patrols, and enhance coordination efforts in regions at high risk for wildfires and other emergencies.

## PROJECT IMPACT

The addition of two new law enforcement vehicles will greatly benefit the rural residents of Mendocino County. These vehicles will provide the Sheriff's Office with reliable and fully equipped options for quick response. With these upgrades, officers will be able to maintain a consistent presence in Redwood Valley, thereby enhancing community safety. The upgraded fleet will reduce maintenance downtime, improve officer safety, and increase the MSCO's capacity to respond quickly to emergencies.

## PROJECT SERVICE AREA

The two new vehicles will be stationed and operate in Redwood Valley.

1. Redwood Valley CDS:  
1,843 total population<sup>21</sup>, 604 households<sup>22</sup>  
\$53,600 median household income (Redwood Valley CDP),  
(56.1% of CA median household income)  
California's median household income (\$91,551)<sup>23</sup>

## PROJECT BUDGET

Budget Item	Cost per Unit	Quantity	Total	Federal Share	Non-Federal Share
<b>Equipment</b>					
Patrol Vehicle	\$55,000	2	\$110,000		\$110,000
Upfitting / Vehicle Equipment	\$30,000	2	\$60,000	\$50,000	\$10,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$170,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>

## FINANCIAL NEED

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office faces budget constraints that limit its ability to independently finance the purchase and equipping of two sheriff vehicles. The County has allocated funds to purchase the new vehicles for the Sheriff's Office, reflecting its commitment to public safety and effective law enforcement. However, the cost of equipping these vehicles with the specialized tools and technology required for emergency response and law enforcement operations presents a significant financial challenge.

Equipping these vehicles involves installing essential features such as:

- Emergency lighting and sirens for public alerts and crisis management,
- Radios and communication systems for coordination during critical incidents,

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<sup>21</sup> 2020 Decennial Census - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>22</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 5 year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

<sup>23</sup> 2022 American Community Survey 5 year Estimates - [Mendocino County, California - Census Bureau Profile](#)

- Protective barriers and safety equipment to ensure deputy and public safety,
- Vehicle-mounted computers and cameras for real-time data access and evidence collection.

These enhancements are crucial for ensuring that the vehicles can perform the diverse and demanding tasks required by the MCSO. However, the County is currently facing budget constraints due to increased demands on general funds and limited revenue growth, resulting in insufficient resources to cover these additional costs.

USDA assistance is crucial for addressing this gap and ensuring that the Sheriff's Office has the necessary tools to serve the community effectively. By funding the vehicle equipment costs, the USDA would enable the County to maximize its investment in public safety, improve emergency preparedness, and more effectively protect residents during crises.

## CONCLUSION

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office is committed to enhancing public safety and ensuring reliable operations for its residents. Funding from the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Grant will provide the MSCO with crucial resources, including two equipped vehicles specifically designed for the challenging terrain of Mendocino County. This funding addresses essential needs in emergency response, reduces vehicle maintenance downtime, and improves services for the rural community of Redwood Valley. Ultimately, it supports the MSCO's mission to deliver timely and dependable law enforcement services.

With the support of the USDA, the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office will be equipped to effectively address public safety priorities and safeguard the well-being of the county's diverse and vulnerable populations. This initiative highlights the commitment to public safety and enhances law enforcement's capacity to respond to the community's needs effectively.