

1.0 Executive Summary

The primary mission of the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) and the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council (MCFSC) is to prepare for and mitigate the likelihood of a disastrous fire in the mountain communities while restoring the forest to a healthy state. Restoring forest health within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), as defined in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), not only benefits the communities in the forest but also protects the forest itself. Reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires in the mountains also protects the communities located below the forest from potential flooding and debris flows. In the process, the organizations focus on helping residents and visitors to understand that they do not live in houses with trees in the yard but rather in a forest with houses in it.

The CWPP is authorized by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA 2003). HFRA emphasizes the need for federal agencies to collaborate with communities in developing hazardous fuel reduction projects and places priority on treatment areas identified by communities themselves through development of a CWPP. Priority areas include the WUI, watersheds, areas impacted by windthrow, insect or disease epidemics, and critical wildlife habitats that would be negatively impacted by a catastrophic wildfire. The CWPP requires agreement among local government, local fire districts, and the state agency responsible for forest management. The CWPP must also be developed in consultation with interested parties and the applicable federal agency managing the land surrounding the at-risk communities.

Riverside County third district supervisor Jeff Stone and staff have been strong supporters and advocates of this plan. As a public safety advocate, Supervisor Stone commends the diligent effort of MAST and the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council. This CWPP is an exemplary example of how community partnerships work to improve a neighborhood's quality of life.

This plan addresses the needs of communities from the top to the bottom of the San Jacinto Mountains. This inclusiveness is meant to ensure that every community has a voice in the protection plan. It also recognizes that all areas of the mountains are a potential starting point for a catastrophic fire. There have been massive multiagency fuel reduction efforts underway for the last several years that have already gone a long way in accomplishing many of the goals identified in the CWPP. This CWPP recommends proactive fuel management including strategic fuelbreaks, strengthening of abatement enforcement ordinances, enhanced outreach and education programs, and a comprehensive evacuation and preparedness program. The CWPP is a living document that will evolve over time. MAST and MCFSC will manage the ongoing maintenance of the plan.

The San Jacinto Mountains have much the same fire problem as other locations in Southern California. Decades of fire suppression have created a critical fuel load in virtually every fuel type. The disastrous fire season of 1910 prompted a national policy of fire exclusion through aggressive fire suppression and prevention activities. An additional factor that changed the condition of the San Jacinto Mountains was decades of logging. This practice

removed old trees in massive quantities and new trees grew up in even-aged stands. The forests of these mountains are not first generation forests. With the advent of development within the wildlands, fires could no longer be allowed to run without considering effects on people's lives and property. This fire exclusion policy has resulted in a tremendous buildup of wildland fire fuels and a significant change in forest composition and stand structure. Fire cannot be arbitrarily reintroduced into the environment without first evaluating and mitigating the effects of this fire exclusion.

Many of the initial organizational requirements have been underway through MAST. MAST has been gathering together the decision makers in the community for the last two years on a monthly basis. One of the main activities of the MAST organization has been to prioritize, organize, and monitor the removal of dead trees killed by the bark beetle infestation. As part of this effort, the firefighting agencies have been engaged in an ongoing fire threat analysis. In 2003, ESRI provided a GIS laboratory for the MAST agencies to develop a multiagency map base for analysis and mapping of tree mortality and resulting activities. All these resources have been a tremendous springboard for the development of the SJCWPP.

1.1 CWPP Goals

- Facilitating and assisting in removal of dangerous fuels to achieve optimal protection of people, property, and habitat
- Continuing and expanding education of residents and interest groups to assist in creating greater safety from fire
- Continuing to support the work of federal, state, and fire protection agency resources in creating a safer environment in the San Jacinto Mountains

1.2 Key Issues Identified in the CWPP

- The definition of Wildland Urban Interface
- Community-prioritized fuel treatment projects
- Abatement and ignitability
- Insurance
- Evacuation

1.2.1 The Definition of Wildland Urban Interface

The WUI shall be inclusive.

The WUI is defined as a geographic area where human habitation and its developments intermix with wildland or vegetative fire fuels. This human development may consist of both interface and intermix communities. The typical boundaries of a WUI exist without reference to municipal city limits or urban growth boundaries. The significance of the

WUI is that it defines the boundary of the CWPP and where recommended actions may apply. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 encourages the community to evaluate other factors, such as watershed, and recreational use that are important to the local community so it can define the WUI to reflect the full spectrum of local considerations. The WUI defined in the CWPP supersedes other WUI definitions.

1.2.2 Community-Prioritized Fuel Treatment Projects

The community identified, recommended, and prioritized agency fuel treatment projects. There is a complete listing of the agency projects in section 10.

1.2.3 Abatement and Ignitability

The community and fire agencies are seeking voluntary compliance. Education and outreach programs will be made available to encourage voluntary compliance. When voluntary compliance fails, abatement enforcement is a very high priority for the communities. The current enforcement regulations are seen as ineffective. Resources to monitor and enforce abatement are inadequate. The situation is complicated by the fact that so many houses are vacation homes. (See section 9.1.)

Recommendations

1. The CWPP recommends the county amend ordinance 695.1 for more enforceable abatement regulations for the San Jacinto Mountains area. The CWPP also recommends that a tax lien program be developed, staffed, and funded as part of the enforcement compliance strategy on both developed and undeveloped lots.
2. Increase inspections and mailings to initiate abatement.
3. Focus on highest risk areas to begin with.
4. Enforce a real estate sales abatement requirement.
5. Report violations to the Fire Safe Council or the local fire station.
6. Develop a mediation process for neighbor-to-neighbor abatement disputes.
7. Change the law on planting flammable ornamentals.
8. The Fire Safe Council will assist homeowners with noncompliant neighbors.
9. MAST will publish fire safe landscaping guidelines containing a list of less flammable plants.
10. Increase education for abatement alternatives that minimize erosion.

11. Streamline process for abatement along roads.
12. Improve the outreach program to provide regulations to everyone in the community.
13. Provide a program to educate the community about removal choices.
14. Institute a fire resistant structures retrofitting program to make existing structures fire resistant.

1.2.4 Insurance

Insurance companies should become more involved with the community and develop a realistic understanding of the fire threat and appropriate mitigation measures for the San Jacinto Mountains area. Statewide rules developed in Sacramento need to be adjusted to fit the realities of this community.

Recommendations

1. MAST members and community representatives will work with agencies and elected officials to assure that insurance abatement requirements are reasonable, consistent, and achievable.
2. The Fire Safe Council should invite the insurance companies to participate in the community fire planning effort to better understand the specific issues, capabilities, and constraints of the San Jacinto Mountains area.
3. Educate the community on what insurance companies are looking for and be proactive in providing that information to them.
4. Insurance companies should offer reduced premiums for fire-resistant structures.

1.2.5 Evacuation

1. Create a neighbor network to facilitate evacuation.
2. Provide evacuation notices (door hangers) to identify evacuation status.
3. Provide education and outreach about available animal evacuation programs.
4. Publicize animal shelter locations.
5. Make sure evacuation routes are adequately marked.
6. Expand evacuation mapping throughout the mountain communities by adding Twin Pines, Poppet Flats, Snow Creek, and Skyland Ranch to the MAST evacuation plan.

7. MAST agencies should distribute evacuation leaflets during an evacuation.
8. Maintain road clearance—California Department of Transportation, USFS, the county, and private owners.
9. Install signs with emergency radio station frequency information.
10. Extend transportation corridor fuels reduction beyond national forest boundaries.
11. Study the possibility of secondary access to Twin Pines Road to Hwy. 243 between Poppet Flats and Vista Grande.
12. Improve mapping throughout the mountain area.
13. Implement reverse 911.
14. Develop and maintain a database of the disabled persons needing assistance during evacuations.
 - a. Provide Fire Safe Council information to law enforcement.
15. Increase radio station WNKI's (emergency radio station) power.

The MAST agencies worked together to produce the *Riverside County Mountain Communities Citizen Evacuation Guide*. The guide includes critical preparedness, contact, and evacuation logistics information. The entire *Riverside County Mountain Communities Citizen Evacuation Guide* is included in appendix G.