

Fire and Forest

Greenwood Award, GSOB Training, and Goodbye to a Friend

by Mike Esnard

(from The Town Crier - June 2013)

The Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council was awarded the 2013 Greenwood Award for outstanding contributions to our regional environment. The award was presented to us by Karen and Richard Greenwood at the Idyllwild Earth Fair this past May 23. We are very grateful for this recognition.

In line with the spirit of the award, we continue to cope with the threat to our oaks posed by the Goldspotted oak borer (GSOB). Executive Director Edwina Scott organized a "Training of Trainers" program to enable local volunteers to train others in the identification of infected trees, which took place last Thursday, May 30, at the Mountain Resource Center.

Conducting the training was the well-known team of Tom Scott and Kevin Turner of the University of California Cooperative Extension from UC Riverside.

The training covered in depth the signs of GSOB in oak trees. Symptoms of infection discussed were smaller and fewer leaves, a reduced canopy, and fading color, as well as stains and exit holes. Jim Taylor, one of the participants, said afterward that the most valuable aspect of the training was the encouragement to step back from a focus on GSOB exit holes and look at the general health of the tree, since diminished vitality is the first indication of the borer.

Participants were MCFSC volunteers Doris Lombard, Ron Perry, and Jim Taylor, along with MCFSC staff Pat Boss and Don Patterson; Erin O'Neill from the Garden Club, Ron Krull from USFS volunteers, and Jonathan Fengler from the local Cal Fire office, which is managing the GSOB tree data base and can remove trees if needed.

Doris Lombard wrote in a thoughtful email that she was “impressed with the enduring passion both Tom Scott and Kevin continue to bring to the campaign to bring GSOB into control.” She also pointed out that “a cutting edge study is unfolding in our community”, and Tom and Kevin “are providing up to the minute publications, postings on the website information designed both for the layman as well as for those who want a more comprehensive scientific treatise on the GSOB.”

Doris also wrote that the UCR team “have taken it upon themselves to train an ever-expanding network of involved citizens, who in turn effectively reach out to other interested citizens.” It is this network of informed citizens that we all hope will be a key to stopping the spread of the oak borer.

A final note on the shock of losing a good friend and colleague, Tom McCullough, who died after elective neck surgery on Monday, May 27, in an LA Hospital. Tom was an early Woodie volunteer, soon became a member of the board, and then our treasurer. It was also my good fortune to work with Tom on the Pine Cove Water District Board, where he served as president.

I am sure my thoughts about Tom are shared by others who knew or worked with him. He was exceptionally smart, as you would expect from a former mathematics professor, but he had the character to match his wits. He was reliable, diligent, and unshakably honest. He had the rare skill of being able to ask the tough questions in a supportive and collegial manner. He was also a delight to work with, partly because of his great sense of humor, and partly because he believed you could work with people to get good things done. We will cherish his memory.