

Fire and Forest

Defensible Space and Grants

by Chris Kramer

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This week I'd like to introduce our Project Manager for the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council. His name is Pat Boss. Those of you who have been around this mountain for any length of time, and I'm talking 50 plus years or more, may have known him as a lad wreaking havoc in his youth. He had bit parts in local movies, was successful in real estate, and had a career with the United States Forest Service. He and his wife Jan owned and operated the original "Jan's Red Kettle" for many years. His knowledge of the forest and the topography is what makes Pat a valuable resource in our community through his position.

When a homeowner makes contact with our office seeking help in making their property fire safe, they are generally put in touch with Pat. An appointment is made to meet at the property with the owner. Once at the property our Project Manager will observe the boundaries of their parcel and see how any work that might be done may also benefit the neighboring property. The scope of the work to be done is always designed around Public Resource Code - Section 4291. The state legislature enacted this mandate in 2005. "Under the law property owners in mountainous areas, forest-covered lands or any land that is covered with flammable material must create at a minimum a 100-foot defensible space (or to the property line) around their homes and other structures." This does not mean the property must be clear-cut to bare soil.

Pat will walk and evaluate the property to see how best to accomplish the reduction and thinning of excess fuels. Vegetation is flagged or marked for trimming or removal. All of this is done with the goal of meeting the requirements of PRC-4291.

This process also becomes an education for the homeowner as the benefits of this work on their particular parcel are explained by Pat. He may also offer other suggestions based on his observations on how to further protect one's home in the event of a wildfire.

This consultation and property evaluation is provided at no cost to the homeowner. Property owners can choose to do the work themselves, if they are able, or use someone they have worked with before. If the work suggested is large and quite involved, the owner may want to consider a licensed tree contractor. A financial aid available through the MCFSC is our grant money that can be applied for fuel reduction work.

Here is an example, let's say this homeowner decided to take advantage of our grant. An application would be filled out between the property owner and the MCFSC. The

Project Manager's description and narrative of the design, work to be done, and job specifications are documented.

This document is then put out to bid to a pool of local, licensed and insured tree contractors that meet the requirement of the MCFSC and the grant. The contractors have one week to inspect or evaluate the job and submit their bid to perform the work outlined in the request. The bids are then opened by the Project Manager and one Board member. The bid for the job is then awarded to the lowest bidder.

Should the property owner agree with going forward using the financial aid of the grant, a "property owners agreement" is signed, and payment of the owner's "cost share" is collected. The tree contractor will then contact the owner and schedule the work.

At the completion, of the work an inspection of our Project Manager is made. He adds "after" photos to go with those that were taken before work was begun to document and go with the file that has been created.

If the property owner is satisfied with the work, he will sign off on the "Property Owners Agreement" form. The tree contractor is notified that the work is completed, and he submits his paperwork for payment. The homeowners cost share payment is then deposited.

Our grants are a 65/35 cost share, meaning that the grant pays for 65% of the cost and the property owner pays 35%. An example would be that for a \$1000 job the property owner pays \$350. We obtain most of our grants from the California Fire Safe Council.

With this work completed, the goal is not only for this property to pass its annual fire inspection as performed by either Cal-Fire or Idyllwild Fire Protection District on our mountain, but to make it more defensible in the event of a wildfire.