All of us at the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council send a special greeting at this time of year to express our sincere appreciation for your generosity and support. Following are tips to keep your holidays safer.

### Home Heating
- Did you have your chimney cleaned?
- Do you always use a glass or metal screen in front of your fireplace when in use to prevent embers or sparks from jumping out?
- Do you know burning charcoal can give off lethal amounts of carbon monoxide. Never use it for indoor heating.
- Are flammable materials away from your fireplace and mantel? A spark from the fireplace could easily ignite these materials.
- Before you go to sleep, do you make sure the fireplace is out? Never close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace. A closed damper will help the fire to heat up again and will force toxic carbon monoxide into the house.

### Candle Care
- Do you blow out all candles when you leave the room or go to bed?
- Are there at least 12 inches of space between your candles and other objects that can burn?

### Other Fire Safety Tips
- Do you have a covered metal container ready to dispose of cooled ashes? Never discard hot ashes inside or near the home.
- Do you know it is a safety hazard to use a range or an oven as a supplemental heating device. It can be a source of potentially toxic fumes.
- Never leave cooking unattended. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S.
- Have you checked your electric blankets for damaged or frayed cords before placing on the bed. Electric blankets should be switched off when not in use.
- Are your space heaters plugged directly into an outlet? If you use an electric heater, be sure not to overload the circuit.
- Avoid using electrical space heaters in bathrooms, or other areas where they may come in contact with water.
- Have you tested your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in the last 30 days? Remember to replace them every 10 years.

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**Fire Takes No Holiday**

**REMEMBERING...**

On October 26, the 10 year anniversary of the Esperanza fire, friends, family and fellow U.S. Forest Service firefighters gathered to remember the crew of Engine 57. At noon, after a moment of silence, a Forest Service dispatcher broadcast the following tribute to the fallen firefighters of Engine 57, “Ten years ago today, the Esperanza fire burned over Engine 57. Five San Bernardino National Forest Service firefighters made the ultimate sacrifice while protecting the American public.”

Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for another.

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INTERVIEW WITH A WOODIE, Ron Perry  
By Marvin Spreyne

The Woodies selected one of their volunteers, Ron Perry, to be interviewed for the newsletter. The MCFSC’s board treasurer, Marvin Spreyne, conducted the interview.

Marvin: What are the Woodies and when did they get started?
Ron: In 2002 a group of community-minded individuals saw that some of the mountain residents were in need of assistance with their fire abatement as their health and or financial situation prevented them from doing the abatement by themselves. The area at the time had an infestation of Bark Beetle that was destroying trees leaving wood that could be fuel for another fire.

Marvin: When did you start your adventure with the Woodies?
Ron: In 2003 I became acquainted with the Woodies program and how it benefits so many worthy people and immediately became a dedicated member.

Marvin: What are the requirements to be a Woodie?
Ron: One must be physically fit, be capable of working as a group and have the desire to serve the residents of the mountain communities.

All new volunteers, both men and women, must be evaluated before they are authorized to use a chain saw or the splitter though they can help load the splitter. They will be assigned a ‘shadow’ to mentor them through the learning process. Most likely they’ll start “learning the ropes” by moving logs around. A dry pine log may weigh 35-40 pounds while a wet one could weigh 65-75 pounds. Oak logs are much heavier. They’ll also operate a wheelbarrow filled with wood to an area to stack it.

All Woodies attend safety meetings where equipment use and procedures are discussed. All Woodies must have medical insurance that in the event of a mishap they would use that insurance coverage. In 13 years no one has been seriously hurt. The Woodies operate under the umbrella of the MCFSC.

Marvin: What equipment does the Woodies have to perform this valuable community service?
Ron: We started with a 40 ton splitter that is still being used. Approximately 5 years ago the Woodies acquired a 30 ton splitter. We also have 3 chainsaws that we purchased and 5 chainsaws that were donated to the cause. All volunteers are advised to possess good leather gloves, steel-toed shoes, a helmet and ear plugs, chaps and a chainsaw are optional.

Marvin: How many Woodies are currently on the roll, how often do they perform their community function and where do they operate?
Ron: We have 13 active Woodies, of which 5 are women. We are doing our service every Friday, weather permitting. All work is done at the Help Center in Idyllwild. Logs are dropped off by contractors providing fire abatement services.

Marvin: What financial resources do the Woodies have available for them to operate?
Ron: Through donations directly to the Woodies and to the Fire Safe Council. Jeff Stone, our former Riverside County 3rd District Board Supervisor, also had the county provide a good chunk of money to the cause and most recently the Idyllwild and Pine Cove Homeowners Associations most graciously made donations to the Woodies.

Marvin: Have the Woodies been involved in the search for the Goldspotted Oak Borer threatening the area oak trees?
Ron: Yes! We have four Woodies that are actively inspecting the area oak trees and working in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service, Riverside County Fire and the University of California Cooperative Extension. This beetle is native to Guatemala, southern Mexico and southeastern Arizona and it’s believed that it was introduced into southern California on fire wood or expanded its range from native regions. It’s imperative that no oak firewood is brought to our mountain communities.

Marvin: Besides the ‘normal’ service provided by the Woodies is there anything that really stands out?
Ron: Besides having fire abated approximately 1000 homes in 13 years I need to mention the following experiences:

In 2004 the Strawberry Fuel Break needed to be tied to the Pine Cove Fuel Break. This involved U.S.F.S. land. This project was the first time a non-U.S.F.S. entity operated on forest land. The project took about 7 months with 25 volunteers working in unison with on occasion upwards to 50. While no ‘clear cutting’ occurred the finished project provided a natural park setting. The special recognition award is proudly displayed in the office of the MCFSC at the Mountain Resource Center in Idyllwild.

Also during the Esperanza Fire in October of 2006, five brave firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service Engine 57 tragically lost their lives in this arson fire. One of those firefighters was Captain Mark Loutzenhiser. It was soon learned that the home that his wife and children were living in was basically falling apart. The Habitat for Humanity organization, the Woodies and individual people and groups came together and tore down the home and rebuilt it. Over $100,000 dollars was raised for the family. Companies from as far away as Orange County donated lumber, tools, and supplies to ensure that the project would be successfully completed.

In July of 2004 a wild fire started in the San Diego area then swept almost to Mexico before swinging back up to the town of Julian. Of 230 homes in Cuyamaca Woods only 17 survived the fire due to the owners having done their fire abatement. A couple of months later the Woodies, on several occasions, drove the 60 miles to cut down the devastated trees as they could fall and injure passersby’s. This work would also aid in the growth of future trees.

And in conclusion, at the beginning of my Woodies participation I met Doris, a Woodies volunteer. Shortly thereafter we married and we’ve both been happy ever after!

Photo: Marvin Spreyne (left) and Ron Perry

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Will Your Home Survive When Embers Arrive

Fire season hit southern California early this year. One of the major fires, the Blue Cut Fire was in August which started in the Cajon Pass and threatened Lytle Creek, Wrightwood, Summit Valley, Baldy Mesa, Phelan and Oak Hills. This fire destroyed 105 single family residences and 216 outbuildings. Many of the home owners had reduced the fuel on their property and created defensible space.

Is Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council giving the wrong message? Why didn’t the defensible space work? What else should homeowners do to prepare for fire season? I discussed these questions with Chief Espinoza, US Forest Service District Fire Management Officer and Pat Boss, MCFSC Field Supervisor and retired US Forest Service Public Affairs Officer to see if they could provide some answers.

Several factors affected the Blue Cut fire: the Cajon Pass acts as a wind tunnel, it started in bone dry brush because of California’s five-year drought; the fire was in rough, steep, terrain, and firefighters were not able to get to the homes and provide structure protection.

Chief Espinoza and Mr. Boss strongly reinforced that the fire safe council’s message to homeowners should be to create and maintain defensible space. If fire crews don’t feel safe they can’t put firefighters at your house. In addition to defensible space, listed below are things you can do to harden your home and make it more fire resistant.

- **Roofs** - Replace shake or wood shingle roofs, with a Class-A roof.
- **Vents** - Cover all vent openings with ember resistant vents.
- **Eaves & Soffits** - Eaves and soffits should be protected with ignition-resistant or non-combustible material.
- **Windows** - Replace single-paned windows with dual or triple-paned ones. One pane should be tempered glass to reduce the chance of breakage in a fire.
- **Walls** - Remodel your walls with ignition resistant building materials, such as stucco, fiber cement, wall siding, fire retardant, treated wood, or other approved materials. Be sure to extend materials from the foundation to the roof.
- **Decks** - Surfaces within 10 feet of the building should be built with ignition resistant, non-combustible materials. Ensure that all combustible items are removed from underneath your deck.
- **Rain gutters** - Clean-out all leaves, needles or flammable debris. Screen or enclose rain gutters to prevent accumulation of plant debris.
- **Chimney** - Cover the chimney and stovepipe outlets with non-combustible screen. Use metal screen material with openings no smaller than 3/8 inch and no larger than 1/2-inch to prevent embers from escaping and igniting a fire.
- **Fences** - Consider using ignition-resistant or non-combustible fence materials.

There is no longer just one fire season. Fire risk—and the need for prevention—is year round.

Water Conservation Tip

Attention all full-time residents and weekenders of the San Jacinto Mountains. As our drought continues in Southern California, we all must use our precious water as efficiently as possible. We all have been taught how to use our water wisely in our homes and for outside use.

But the most important thing to do in preventing water loss is to always shut your water off when you leave your mountain home for any extended period of time.

Jerry Holldber, General Manager
Pine Cove Water District

2017 "State of the San Jacinto Mountain" Briefing and Discussion

**SAVE THE DATE**

**When:**
Saturday, January 28, 2017
10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

**Where:**
Idyllwild Nature Center
25225 CA Hwy 243, Idyllwild, CA 92549

**Presentations:**
▲ Preparing our communities to survive a wildland fire
▲ Status of the Goldspotted Oak Borer in our communities & what you can do
▲ Current and future fuels reduction projects and staffing levels in the San Jacinto Mountains

**Presenters include:**
MCFSC, U.S. Forest Service, University of California & CALFIRE

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The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (now CALFIRE) came up with the idea of local Fire Safe Councils in 1993. In 2001 both CALFIRE and the U.S. Forest Service wanted a local fire safe council on the hill. With Idyllwild totally surrounded by national forest, a group of us jumped on the idea. We formed the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council (MCFSC) then and there and haven’t looked back. CALFIRE’s original idea was for the FSC’s to simply educate the locals about keeping down the brush and overhanging tree limbs, but the MCFSC quickly discovered more was needed. It was then that we formed the Woodies. This volunteer group has helped those who cannot afford yard cleanup or tree removal now for almost fourteen of our now fifteen years. Cutting waste wood into fireplace sized pieces; the Woodies to date have donated more than 600 cords of firewood to the Help Center. Imagine a pile of neatly stacked wood four feet wide, four feet high and almost a full mile long.

From the beginning the MCFSC has obtained government grants to contract with commercial tree removal companies that are licensed and insured. To date, MCFSC has received more than $4,000,000 in grants to remove fuels from private properties. These funds helped more than 2,000 homeowners create defensible space around their homes from Poppet Flats to Mountain Center and into the Pinyon area.

In addition to yard abatement, MCFSC received a FEMA grant to help home owners replace shake/wood shingle roofs with Class A, fire resistant ones. That grant (which was just completed) replaced 100 roofs in the Idyllwild/Pine Cove area!

The MCFSC also now works with CALFIRE, the Forest Service and UCR doing surveys and data collection on the spread of the Goldspotted Oak Borer (GSOB) in hopes of establishing a long range management plan to minimize oak tree loss.

With the work of the Woodies, our local contractors, public donations and our fire agencies, MCFSC hopes to continue to mitigate the effects of wildfire in our mountain communities.

## Updating the 2006 San Jacinto Mountains Community Wildfire Protection Plan

In 2006, the communities of the San Jacinto Mountain approved our current San Jacinto Mountains Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). In this plan, authorized by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, our local fire agencies identify and prioritize wildfire risk areas and recommended the types and methods of treatments that will protect our communities and essential infrastructure. CWPPs have become the primary mechanism for evaluating risk due to their emphasis on community involvement and assessment of local resources.

Since the original CWPP, our mountain has experienced three devastating fires, the Esperanza, Mountain and Silver. Community members learned a lot from these fires. This is an opportunity for us to also become familiar with the priority areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and understand the types and methods of treatment that will protect their communities.

The fire safe council again hired ESRI to provide consulting services to assist MCFSC with updating the plan. The 2006 plan identified numerous fuels reduction projects on our mountain. The revision will reflect what accomplishments have been made on these projects and identify any risks that are not listed in the previous plan. Once this update is completed, the CWPP will become a living document. CALFIRE has agreed to maintain the plan. The Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) will review and refresh the plan every other year.

As the revision proceeds, several public meetings will be held in 2017 to solicit suggestions from the whole community. Before that time we hope you will become familiar with the original plan available for your review at: mcfsc.org/documents/2006_sanjac_fireplan.pdf. Beginning the first of the year, ESRI will post ongoing updates to the CWPP on our website: mcfsc.org.

Local leaders and governmental funders find CWPPs valuable for the purposes of identifying critical needs and prioritizing funding.

**We look forward to working with you on this plan!**