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Editor's Corner

Blair Cenicerros

Greetings. As your new editor I'll try to maintain the high quality of the previous editions. At this writing I feel a little uncertain because I've never used Microsoft Publisher before. For a WordPerfect veteran, this is new territory.

As a Board member, let me express pride in being part of a Fire Safe Council that has "the most active board in the State," according to California Fire Safe Council executives. Coupled with volunteers and staff unparalleled anywhere, we are accomplishing work that none of us even dreamed of when the organization was born.

If the grants keep comin', we'll keep pluggin'.

DECEMBER STORM DOWNSTREES

The biggest snow storm in recent memory hit the San Jacinto Mountain in mid - December. Pine Cove and Idyllwild were particularly hard hit. With night time temperatures in the teens and below, many trees froze and snapped off under the



weight of the snow. Pine trees, manzanita, and black oaks were the most susceptible.

Limbs and tree tops took down power lines and power poles. On one street in Fern Valley, three poles were snapped or knocked down in just one block. Power was out for four days in some places.

Cal Fire quickly announced a program using grant funds, in conjunction with Riverside County, to clean up the debris on private property.. These were young and mature trees that snapped.

Oak limbs 12 to 14 inches in diameter came down.

At the request of Cal Fire, MCFSC got into the act. Project managers Don Patterson, Pat Boss, and Mike Kellner were kept busy assessing damage and

coordinating contacts with property owners with downed tree tops and limbs. Local contractors were employed to do the work on time and materials basis.

Property owners with downed trees should call the MCFSC at 951-659-6208. A form for you to sign authorizing the work will be sent to you. When it's

Australian "Flee or Fight" Plan Under Review

The much discussed Australian "Leave Early or Stay and Defend" policy will be reviewed by officials there after 130 people

died in the recent fire storms.

Australian fire officials had been promoting this plan, training homeowners to defend their homes, for a decade after the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires in which 83 deaths and 2,600 injuries occurred.

Although the plan has been discussed and promoted in this country and throughout the world, Cal Fire, Forest Service, and Idyllwild Fire chiefs rejected the concept at the last Mountain Area Safety Task Force meeting at the Nature Center.

MAST officials were unanimous in the belief that it wasn't a good plan anywhere and certainly not in our forest.

The conventional wisdom for fire emergency is "Follow directions from emergency personnel." If they say "prepare to evacuate," load what valuables you can into your vehicle and spray your house with gel, if you have it. If they say, "Evacuate now," leave *immediately* by the rout they indicate.

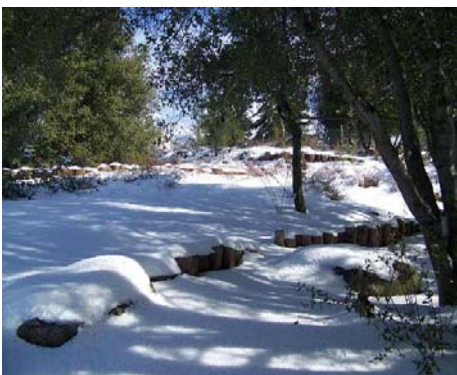
Don't go off on your own; stay on the designated evacuation route. The agencies know where the fire is and if you start on your own route you may drive right into the fire. Don't endanger rescue personnel.



SAVING RAINWATER BY TERRACING YOUR PROPERTY

by Doris Lombard

The amount of water of one inch of rain on one acre is 27,150 gallons. Last winter our 2.42 acre yard got 24 inches of precipitation. That means that more than three-quarters of a million (788,436) gallons of water landed in our yard!



We are learning to do what we can to manage that huge amount of water and to maximize the availability of that water for a healthy forest.

That means where possible there is a good layer of pine needle and leaf mulch. Humus-rich, healthy soils absorb water like a sponge. In that spongy soil are living fungal mats called mycorrhiza. Mycorrhizal mats capture that rain and snow moisture and along with essential soil nutrients, feed it directly into the plants' root systems.

Within the required 30' abated soil zone around buildings, terracing works to slow down gutter catchment's run-off and allows water to soak into the ground. Starting at the highest point create a series of miniature dips and swales, interconnected and engineered to gradually descend, guide and hold the water in pools. Rocks are helpful

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for shaping the waterways you create and low-growing fire-resistant groundcover plantings add an attractive touch. I like the annual Alyssums for their colors and fragrance.

On a larger scale, expanses of sloping ground lend themselves well to this method of capturing and returning groundwater. Rock-lined gravel pathways designed as dams serve double duty as miniature firebreaks and to hold back the flow of water as it soaks and seeps into the soil.

Uncontrolled run-off causes erosion and wastes a precious resource

For more intriguing information about mycorrhiza see Steve Trudell's MykoWeb: ". . . I am fond of telling people that mycorrhizas are responsible for all that is good in the world."

Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands by Brad Lancaster (2006) Rainsource Press contains a wealth of ideas.

MORE ON "LEAVE EARLY OR STAY AND DEFEND"

By Norm Walker, USFS Ret.

[Editor's note: Because this subject is literally a life or death issue, several stories about it are included in this edition]

I wrote a letter opposing the Australian "Leave Early or Stay and Defend" model about three months ago because I was afraid of the flawed research (I read the research paper). It seemed ludicrous to Beta test the theory with human subjects, but that's what they did and the results (if you ask most fire chiefs) were predictable.

The media makes heroes out of those who defy firefighters orders and stay to protect their homes. However, the media fails to research

deaths caused by waiting too long to evacuate, no matter what the reason. Unfortunately for too many people, the last thing they learned on this earth was that they were losing the battle to save their homes.

People have suffered permanent respiratory injuries from "successfully" defending their homes but the media does not follow up on those kinds of stories either.

In old towns like the ones on this mountain, trees are large and there's a lot of them, brush is abundant, even new homes are not built to withstand fire brands, and streets are narrow. The irony is that these are also the traits that lured most of us up here!

The price we pay for the lifestyle we live is that when it's time to evacuate.....it's time to evacuate! If an Engine Company decides they cannot save my home with two 1 1/2" hose lines, each flowing 100 gpm, then what chance do I have with a garden hose flowing 3 gpm?

FIRESCOPE/BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 13, 2009

PREPARE ... LEAVE EARLY ... FOLLOW EVACUATION ORDERS

The following joint statement was issued today by FIRESCOPE and the Governor's Blue Ribbon Fire Task Force, The two groups consist of local fire chiefs from throughout California, the CAL FIRE director and officials from federal agencies, along with organizations representing rank-and-file firefighters.

The preeminent duty of the fire service is protection of human life. For that reason, the California fire service stands united in the position that early evacuation in the face of life-threatening wildfire is the single most important thing any homeowner can do to protect lives.

Continued on pg. 3

The guiding principle of California's approach remains consistent and unwavering: Prepare your property, leave early, and follow all evacuation orders.

The fire service continues to study a variety of ideas and initiatives to enhance the protection of property, including supporting residents in returning to their property as quickly as possible. We also understand the need to find ways to assist those who are unable or unwilling to evacuate in a timely manner.

As a profession, the fire service is anxious to work cooperatively with individual communities, homeowners, local government, media, law enforcement and local, state and federal fire officials to build a fire-safe future. However, any consideration of the Australian so-called "Leave Early or Stay and Defend" policy would be irresponsible at this time in light of the tragedy in Australia, as well as California's own experience responding to firestorms.

Given California's ever-present risk of catastrophic wildfire, any fire protection plan must include a determined and forceful commitment to all available fire prevention strategies. In particular, it must recognize the value of Reverse 911, building with non-igniting materials, maintaining a defensible space around structures, and preparing a home for the arrival of firefighters who have the experience of working under extreme conditions.

Finally, to achieve Fire Adaptive Communities, we must renew our efforts to provide the resources necessary to insure that California's emergency responders will be able to continue to protect the lives and property of its citizens.

**A HEALTHY FOREST IS A
HEALTHY HABITAT**



WOODIES JUST KEEP ON TICKIN'. Front row: left to right: Veda Roubideaux, Viv Larsen, Janice Fast, Don Patterson, Doris Lombard. Back row: Mike Kellner, Miguel Kellner, Jim Taylor, Ron Perry, and Pascal Simon.

The self-named "Woodies," the Fire Safe Council volunteer abatement corps, have been going since 2003 raking pine needles and cutting brush to make properties conform to fire inspection standards.

They work on properties of senior citizens and those unable to pay contractors for the work.

Started by Lee Salgren and Larry Kueneman, the first project was actually on Forest Service land on Overlook Drive in Pine Cove. The parcel goes from Overlook up a rise and then down into a gully.

The area was so thick with manzanita that one could not walk through it. The Woodies worked twice a week for half a day for over a year to clear the thicket of manzanita and dead pine trees. After several months, they were joined by a Forest Service contractor who was able to take down large trees and remove them.

Eventually, the Forest Service brought in a huge chipper that was able to reduce whole tree trunks to chips, scattering them over the site

to provide mulch.

While the Woodies were working in the gully, which ran up to Hotei Lane, they reported deer coming into the thinned area to see what was going on.

The project put the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council on the map, drawing attention from the Department of Forestry (now Cal Fire) and the Forest Service. On a visit to the San Bernardino Nation Forest, acting Dept. of Forestry director Andrea Tuttle and USFS Regional Forester Jack Blackwell toured the Overlook project. They were quite impressed at what a group of retired folk had accomplished.

Several small (compared to recent ones running into six figures) grants from the Forest Service enabled FSC to buy trailers and other equipment to enhance capabilities for abatement work.

Larger grants enabled FSC to hire contractors to do abatement work beyond the capabilities of the Woodies, and even larger grants have followed.

In 2003, FSC received a national award from the Forest Service.



Josh Whitney's crew trims storm damaged oak tree.

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Mike & Emily Pearson

Pearson (left) donated the tree used for the 1997 Tree Management. He also regularly donates trees to the HELP Center for those in need.

ABATEMENT SEASON IS HERE

Inspections start soon. Off Hill property owners should visit their mountain properties to assess any damage to trees and/or structures. Clean-up of properties is essential to reducing fire hazard.

The contractors advertising on this page are used by the FSC for grant work. They are licensed, insured, and bonded. Help is available through FSC for a 25% co-pay.

The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the California Fire Safe Council or the U.S. Government. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the California Fire Safe Council or the U.S. Government.

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