



# Newsletter

Volume 4, Winter Issue

December 2008

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## Editor's Corner

Reba Coulter, Exec. Dir.



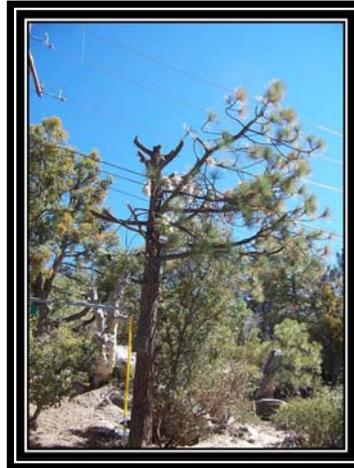
Don, Mavy, Mike, Reba, Pat

## "Happy Holidays" from the MCFSC staff

*During this holiday season may we be truly thankful that once again we have been blessed with another year of freedom from wildfire. We have also been blessed with continued grant funding that permits our fuel abatement program to encompass all communities of Mr. San Jacinto. We at MCFSC wish you safety, health, and happiness throughout the coming year...*

## ROWTS PROGRAM PLANNED

Throughout the Idyllwild and Pine Cove area, Southern California Edison (SCE) has regularly trimmed trees away from power lines in an effort to prevent power outages and guard against potential fire. Although this practice complies with the state fire regulations, in a forest health context, the practice is undesirable. Many trees growing directly under the power lines have to be repeatedly topped and cut resulting in unhealthy trees more at risk of insects, disease, breakage and additional fuel loading along evacuation routes.



Example of a tree within the right-of-way.

and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Private landowners with affected trees under Edison lines are also encouraged to participate. The trees to be removed are generally small, stunted, unsightly and unhealthy. However, CAL FIRE understands the removal may raise some concern within the community and encourages you to contact them if you have questions or concerns.

Contact:  
 CALFIRE Staff  
 P.O. Box 2097  
 Idyllwild, CA 92549  
 Phone: (951) 659-3337

Riverside County Fire in partnership with CAL FIRE and the Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST) is sponsoring a project with the

Idyllwild and Pine Cove communities that will remove the unhealthy and at-risk trees within the right-of-ways of Riverside County Land Transportation Agency (TLMA)

Or stop by the office at the Mountain Resource Center  
 25380 Franklin Dr.  
 Idyllwild, CA 92549



## MCFSC HOSTS NOVEMBER PUBLIC MEETING AT NATURE CENTER

The cooperative spirit of the various fire and forest agencies on the mountain was beautifully demonstrated at a public meeting on November 6, 2008 held at the Idyllwild Nature Center. Featured speakers were Dave Fiorella (USFS), John Hawkins (Cal Fire), Mike Esnard (MCFSC facilitator), Steve Kunkle (IFPD), and Norm Walker (USFS—ret.). Not shown were and Kevin Turner and Duane Chamlee (Cal Fire). Many local residents were also in attendance. The panel discussed numerous topics of mutual concern along with plans for future projects.





Two of IFPD's six fire fighting rigs and one of its three ambulances stand ready to roll. The truck in the center of the picture is equipped with a boom/ladder capable of directing water to a fire on a hill, a burning cabin on the upside of a slope, a building on the other side of a building blocking closer access, or rescuing someone trapped in the second story of a burning building.

## IFPD DETERMINED TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

### Ben Killingsworth, IFPD Board Member

During the past few months the Idyllwild Fire Protection District (IFPD) has been coping with two situations which have brought about a great deal of unfavorable publicity and public dissatisfaction.

The first such situation was the implementation of the so-called forced abatement program. After years of being unable to convince every property owner of the need to abide by the IFPD ordinance requiring owners to properly clear their properties of combustible materials, IFPD decided to launch a program whereby owners who refuse to cooperate are subjected to a forced abatement. To carry out the program, IFPD engaged the services of Fire Protection Services Inc., (FPS) a company specializing in managing forced abatement programs.

During the course of implementing the program there were some inadvertent missteps, the first being the decision to send every one of the 3,767 property owners within the district a "NOTICE TO ABATE HAZARD." The intent of the notice was simply to tell property owners to make sure their property was in compliance with the abatement ordinance, but because of the wording used, the notice appeared to be telling the owners that their property was not in compliance. For example, the words "THIS IS CONSIDERED A NOTICE TO ABATE VIOLATION," were followed by, "that may be existing on your property....," but most owners didn't notice the word "may," and took it to mean they were in violation of some unspecified rule in the abatement ordinance.

This notice, the first of three sent to those whose property was not abated in a timely manner, created a great deal of anxiety and ill will.

Another problem, which only affected 12 of the 3,767 property owners, i.e., those whose property was forcibly abated by FPS, was the extremely high prices FPS charged property owners for carrying out the forced abatements; amounts much higher than an independent tree service would have charged for the same work. However, FPS also had the legal right to recover the cost of gathering and documenting the evidence needed to support a forced abatement, which in many cases was considerable.

This was compounded by the fact that some of the effected owners did not, or say they did not receive any of the three notices, although each notice was mailed to the address listed in the Riverside County Assessor's records as the last recorded address of the legal owner of the property, which satisfied legal requirements.

Unfortunately, the listed addresses may or may not have been the current address of the property owner, either because the owner hadn't notified the assessor of a change of address, or because the assessor's records were not up to date.

IFPD is now in the process of seeking responses to a newly developed 'Request For Proposal,' a document which invites any individual, company or organization to submit a plan describing how they would carry out a forced abatement program on behalf of IFPD.

The second situation was an apparent breakdown in certain aspects of the financial management of the department, and while there was no loss of funds, it did cast an unfavorable light on the department's ability to manage its finances in a transparent and credible manner.

First, there was the failure to present and adopt a budget in a timely manner, and, second, was our inability to produce the results of audits covering the last four consecutive years. The reasons for these failures are still being analyzed. Meanwhile, steps are being taken to rectify the situation and make sure it doesn't happen again.

To that end, one of the Fire Commissioners has been appointed board treasurer, who will oversee all phases of the financial management of the district.

## Tree Value and Ways to Protect Your Investments

### Deborah Geisinger ISA Certified Arborist

How much are trees worth? Most likely more than you think. We all know that trees provide timber and food, habitat for wildlife, replenish the environment with oxygen and filter pollution. Most people also know that trees can reduce utility costs. According to the American Forest Industry Association, one tree in the city can provide savings of up to \$274 a year in air-conditioning costs. However, the value of landscape trees largely results from the aesthetic improvements they bring to the property. The need to define this value relates to insurance claims, tax deductions, legal claims, real-estate assessments, among other things. The four major factors involved in properly assessing the value of a tree are size, species, condition and location based on its functional and aesthetic purposes. A thorough understanding of each is imperative and must be completed before the actual assessment can be made. There are various methods for assessment depending on the

*Continued on pg. 4*

## Radio Communications and Fire Safety

Bill Tell KD6KTV, MHRC Board Member



The Mile High Radio Club (MHRC) is very active and plays an important roll in our community. The club's core values are focused on emergency communications through their financial sponsorship of the Mountain District Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) organization and maintenance of our fixed site communications repeater.

The primary mission of Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) during an emergency or disaster is to provide communication services that include the use of portable stations, either as a backup to established communications, or as a fill in where communications do not normally exist or have failed.

The Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) is a public service provided by a volunteer group of amateur radio operators that is directed by local, county and state emergency management agencies and operated under the auspices of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the United States government. RACES provides radio communications during periods of local, regional or national civil emergencies. These emergencies are not limited to war related activities, but can include natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, wildfires, power outages, floods, victim searches, air crashes, and many others.

Locally the Mountain District RACES organization serves the areas of Idyllwild, Pine Cove, Fern Valley, Mountain Center, Garner Valley, Poppet Flats and Pinyon Pines.

### Fire Watch – US Forest Service

During times of Red Flag warnings, the MHRC and RACES are often activated for Fire Watch. Radio operators are assigned

to strategic sites in the field depending on conditions and the requirements of local fire officials. Reports are radioed in from the field every half hour to a command post located at the Forest Service. Field radio operators are also equipped with portable weather meters, binoculars, topography maps and compasses allowing them to better report field conditions.

### Smokey Knows, When All Else Fails, Ham Radio Works!

Smokey was sighted on amateur radio at the Health and Resource Fair put on by Idyllwild's Help Center. With Smokey's help, members of RACES Mountain District and the MHRC displayed portable communications equipment for the public, educating them on the importance of amateur radio in their community. In times of emergency, normal communications are often non-operational. With our equipment, we are able to set up in a matter of minutes.

### Why Ham Radio Works So Well.

Telephones, cell phones, internet, and satellite phones are very complex. To get the message out they all have to go through many vulnerable choke points and need electrical power. Even if the system is functioning, these systems can be overwhelmed by the number of cries for help and families seeking information. Ham operators can operate just fine without other infrastructure. By selecting the right frequencies, hams can talk across town or around the world.

FEMA advises that in a crisis you should plan to be totally on your own for at least 3 days. How will you communicate? To learn more about the MHRC or RACES Mountain District, visit our web site at [www.milehighradioclub.org](http://www.milehighradioclub.org) e-mail us at [mhrc@arrl.net](mailto:mhrc@arrl.net) or write MHRC, PO Box 1204, Idyllwild, CA 92549-1204.

**Do something wonderful,  
people may imitate it.  
– Albert Schweitzer**

*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.*

## Prescribed Burning Planned by Cal Fire

Cal Fire will be conducting fuel reduction prescribed burning on the following projects during December 2008 through March 2009 as weather and AQMD regulations permit:

**Point of Rocks** located on the south east corner of the San Jacinto State Park between Cree Lane east to Jameson Drive north of Rockdale Drive.

**Maxwell Trail** at the northernmost end of the trail south of Humber Park.

**Red Hill North** south of HWY 243 between Pine Cove Road, and west to Baldy Road.

In addition to the above projects Idyllwild, Fern Valley, and Pine Cove residents may receive a request to participate in a CAL-FIRE Vegetation Management Project (VMP) in two additional areas, Point of Rocks Phase II which will extend from the current Point of Rocks end at Chipmunk Drive to the extreme north end of Fern Valley, and the Redhill South VMP which has had significant work completed over the years and requires reopening for maintenance and additional treatment. The Redhill essentially covers the land between Buckhorn Camp south to Camp Emerson, and east to HWY 243.

These projects are designed to reduce fuel loading and modify the fuel arrangement around the perimeter of our mountain communities; this is part of a pre-fire plan to keep a major fire from moving into the communities. In addition, the fuel-modified zone will better enable the fire department to keep fires that might start within the community or along the highway from moving into the surrounding wildlands. These projects are composed of thinning the existing vegetation to a park like setting by limbing up trees, removing ground litters and dead vegetation in a broken fashion, as to not have a liner appearance. The materials will be chipped when possible and remaining material would be piled and burned when appropriate weather is present.

Any questions regarding these projects, please contact the Chief Kevin Turner or Battalion Chief Dan Johnson at the Mountain Resource Center at 951-659-3337.

## Mt. San Jacinto State Park: Prescribed Burn

California State Parks personnel are nearing the final stages in the planning process for a fuel reduction project in Mt. San Jacinto State Park. The project area is adjacent to the Stone Creek Campground 5 miles northwest of Idyllwild and includes approximately 300 acres.

The project is divided into multiple sub-units and is expected to take four to eight years to complete. The timeframe for project completion is largely dependent on fire-weather conditions allowing for safe burning windows. The plan, which includes thinning, chipping, and pile, as well as understory burning is intended to im-

prove the health of the existing forest, in turn reducing threats from wildfire to the mountain communities.

USFS and Cal-Fire officials have cooperated in providing staff with professional advice and critiques along the way. California State Parks will continue to include these agencies throughout the project. We will also continue to communicate our progress with the local community groups providing information as the plan matures. Communication will come in the form of further press releases and public meetings.

The prescribed burning phase of the project will occur after the necessary preparatory steps are completed. The actual burn days will be largely dictated by weather conditions. We anticipate starting pre-burn preparation steps for this multi-year project during the winter months of 2008. For those who frequent the Stone Creek campground we do not anticipate any interruption to the camping season.

Garratt Aitchison  
Sector Superintendent  
(951)659-4880



## Join Us in Making Our Communities Fire Safe

*Tree Value - Continued from pg. 2*

situation. In summary, these are the replacement-cost method, the trunk formula, and the cost of repair or cost of cure method. One is not inherently better than the other. Experienced tree appraisers sometimes use more than one method to ensure accuracy. If you have any uncertainty about which method to use or how to use it, contact a qualified professional. Keep in mind, the appraised value of a tree should be reasonable in relation to the value of the property on which it sits. According to the Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers, a mature tree often can add an appraised value of \$1,000 to \$10,000 ... when comparing a home to similar properties. This figure could be much higher in some situations and landscaping in general can contribute 15% to 20% of a homes total value.

How can you protect these investments? Maintenance says it all. However, the design and techniques used for long-term tree maintenance can vary drastically. Since tree vigor is dependent on reducing poor soil conditions and encouraging soil health, the design for short- and long-term maintenance depends on the history and situation of your unique property. For example, most yard soils are compacted and do not provide adequate nutrients for healthy trees. Compaction means soils are low in oxygen and do not allow water to infiltrate. This also leads to runoff and erosion and inhibits the trees ability to uptake any water that does make it to the absorbing roots. Raised

soil elevations within 6' feet of mature trees can also reduce soil oxygen, inhibiting uptake. This can be especially troublesome with tall trees making them dry, brittle and subject to wind throw (snapping off). In addition, low in organic matter means low in available nutrients and depleted populations of micro-organisms (the tiny soil creatures responsible for recycling organic matter and releasing nutrients). This can be due to organic matter being raked off, competition with grass and car or foot traffic. Furthermore, mulch that has not been composted, such as raw wood chips, can lead to other soil imbalances and should be supplemented with a nitrogen source.

For those who like to do their own tree maintenance, a site created by The International Society of Arboriculture to educate the general public on research-based methods of basic tree horticulture is [www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org).

If you need to locate an ISA Certified Arborist near you, please visit:

[www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com)



### APPLICATION FORM

(\$10 per person or \$20 for family)

(Name)

(Mailing AND Street Address) (Circle-Anza, Idyllwild, Mtn. Center, Pine Cove, Pinyon)

(City State and Zip)

(Phone)

(Email address)

MCFSC

PO Box 507

25380 Franklin Dr.

Idyllwild, CA 92549

Winter 2008

If you would like to receive a newsletter via email, please send your email address to [exec-dir@MCFSC.org](mailto:exec-dir@MCFSC.org) Please remember that your contributions are tax deductible.

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