

High Fire Season Returns

By Jean Yamamura

As anyone who hikes the Jesusita and Tunnel trails can testify: the brush is back. After a beautiful spring of wildflowers and Santa Barbara-perfect weather, inevitably, summer and fall will bring the dreaded hot, dry season when the winds kick up, the plants dry out, and fire dangers increase. As always, our question is, are we prepared for fire season?

For all who want to use the pleasant weather to their advantage to get their landscaping or home into fire-savvy shape, the County Fire Department's current Ready, Set, Go! publication spells out some more nuanced lines of defense, from viable landscapes in fire country to a "hardened" home, action plans, and checklists. It also makes it clear that it's what we do around our homes that increases the chances of surviving a wildfire.

Consider this, when the Jesusita Fire was threatening the upper borders of the Botanic Garden, embers were flying beyond Las Canoas and landing near Foothill Road. Wildland-urban interface homes like ours are considered at risk from wind-blown embers, and embers are how wildfire travels so fast. (See accompanying box on embers workshop.)

Everyone should be familiar with defensible space by now. This creates a zone around your house that prevents flames and radiant heat from hitting your house directly. The zone also gives firefighters room in which to operate. If your landscaping includes pampas grass, acacia, cedar, cypress, eucalyptus, juniper, pine, or palm, be aware that keeping them well-maintained and limbed up or trimmed, and thinning any mass plantings prevents these potentially hazardous plants from flaring into trouble during a wildfire.

For houses themselves, Ready, Set, Go takes a look at roofs, eaves, vents, walls, windows and doors, and balconies and decks and makes recommendations on how to better protect them against fire.

Interestingly, this fire manual prepares residents for the possibility that they might be trapped at home by a fast-moving wildfire. Being prepared by bringing flammables indoors or placing them in a pool, and knowing the location of gas, electric and water cut-off controls are some of the manual's advice. It continues with survival tips such as moving flammables away from windows, wearing long sleeves and pants made of natural fibers such as cotton, assembling a brush fire survival kit, and having an exit strategy.

Naturally, evacuating early whenever possible is the smartest way to be



Clear the Road: Plants growing in the roadway just make our narrow streets even skinnier. For safety's sake, please evaluate the vegetation along your property line and trim them firmly back and out of the right-of-way. Keeping our evacuation corridors unobstructed is everyone's business.

PHOTO: Lee Anne Dollison

safe. For more, consult Ready, Set, Go! at sbcfire.com, or contact the MCA webmaster (webmaster@missioncanyon.org) to have one mailed to you.

Embers Protection Workshop

By Cathy Brooke, Fire Safe Council

We've all seen wildfire coverage on television of homes that seem well built and fire resistant (stucco walls, tile roofs, and so on) yet are lost to the flames. Why? The answer usually involves tiny embers that travel like raindrops and penetrate even the most defensible construction as they fall into flammable materials accumulated in gutters, bird nests in tile roofs, wood decks with fabric cushions on patio furniture, or wood piles too close to homes.

The California Fire Safe Council and Farmers Insurance are bringing a free workshop our way on protecting, or hardening, our homes against ember intrusion on Wednesday, August 4, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Ventura Beach Marriott, 2055 East Harbor Boulevard. Pat Durland, the speaker at the workshop, worked for a number of years as a wildland fire specialist in Boise, Idaho, during his 35 years of fire service, and is a gifted and inspiring lecturer.

Please register for this timely workshop at firesafecouncil.org.



Pat Durland

SBBG Expansion Approved

By Jean Yamamura, with Paulina Conn

More than a hundred Santa Barbarans spent May and June attending meetings of the Board of Supervisors every other week to take part in the appeals regarding the Botanic Garden's facilities expansion plan. Board chair Janet Wolf counted 70 speaker slips on the first day, with citizens walking up to the clerk of the board as she spoke, handing in more of the requests to speak. By the end of the third hearing, amendments to the project were made, the appeals otherwise denied, and the project approved.

The first day concluded after presentations by the appellants—Mission Canyon Association, Friends of Mission Canyon, and Frank Arredondo—and by the Botanic Garden. Then, after having waited all day for their two minutes at the podium, what seemed like a hundred members of the public told the supervisors how they felt about the Garden's development. Feelings unanimously rang with love for the Garden, augmented by praise for its education outreach and the occasional disparaging remark directed at project detractors, or tempered with concern over the Garden's ambitions and the consequences for Mission Canyon.

An hour or two into the second day, the smoke had cleared sufficiently from another onslaught of speakers (many treated to lunch by the Garden, others straggling in for a last-minute rally) for the supervisors themselves to weigh in on how they viewed the proposal. In turn, the five questioned planning staff about what would happen to the Gane House, did the building height exceed 25 feet, where were the shuttle buses supposed to park, and other practical minutia.

First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal, since the Garden is in his district, had the final say, and he was well-prepared, having made notes as speakers spoke and also having patiently listened, as had all the supervisors save Joni Gray, to an endless parade of concerned citizens wanting a piece of his time in the weeks before the first hearing. (Gray has a policy of not receiving visitors concerning appeals to the Board.)

Carbajal approached all the difficult decisions head-on, directing staff to amend the Garden's plan regarding maximum capacity limits (205 people onsite at any one time during high fire season, 255 during low fire, 110,000 total annually), special event restrictions (17 per year), community event restrictions (10 per year), amplification of music (not allowed, amplification allowed for speech), fencing (remove chainlink, allow post and wire), pavers (naturalistic ones



Time Limit: The popular, but flammable, Toad Hall falls into the category of "temporary exhibits," which have a two-year lifespan, instead of three, under the Garden's pending 2010 conditional use permit.

PHOTO: Lee Anne Dollison

allowed, but not in the historic areas, except around buildings), definition of Red Flag conditions, cultural resources (Native American monitor onsite during soil disturbance), and much more, all of which are contained online in 94 single-spaced pages at the county's Planning and Development website.

The Garden received approval for most of its building requests—getting a green light on the education center, new horticultural offices and shops, herbarium, and children's center—but not the two new employee residences proposed for the Hansen site. Planning staff rescinded that recommendation after the Chumash challenged the disturbance of archaeological deposits there, and after a citizen convincingly pointed out that the property was zoned for one caretaker cottage and that already more than that number existed as a result of "grandfathering."

Among the development impacts important to Mission Canyon residents are that, before building begins, the water and sewer infrastructure will be installed and tested to ensure the building process has sufficient water in case of emergency. Also, to provide some breathing room, each phase of construction will be followed by a pause equal to half the construction time or a year, whichever is longer.

At the end of the third day, after more public speakers fruitlessly pitched the supervisors in last-minute efforts to affect the out-

come, all five supervisors voted to approve the amended development plan.

The Meadow Terrace

The fourth appeal being heard by the supervisors on those three days was brought by the Botanic Garden in the hope of altering the Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission's recommendation to abandon the terrace project. That appeal was also denied. The Board of Supervisors upheld HLAC's recommendations that the Terrace Project be removed in its entirety and that the area be restored and an oak replanted. Further, HLAC will have review of the Cultural Landscape Master Plan before Planning and Development gives its okay.

The three hearings were the culmination of the Garden's struggle to update and expand its facilities, an effort that has taken nearly a decade and cost millions of dollars. But the extensive project, which adds more than 20,000 square feet of structures and will take another decade to complete, may be its last. The supervisors included in their conditions a note to "future decision makers" that they believe the Botanic Garden "has reached a maximum level" and that "no further increase in intensity of use be allowed."

Still, the Garden won't be breaking ground tomorrow. As of our press time, the Garden's Board of Trustees had not yet met to decide whether to accept the supervisors' verdict or not.

N E W S I N B R I E F

Of Roads and Fire Hydrants

As permit deadlines come up, Jesusita rebuilders caught in problems with their insurance companies heard some good news at a meeting with county staff on May 17. Dianne Black, director of P&D's Development Services, counseled rebuilders to keep their case managers informed about any delays or difficulties, well before any permit-type deadlines come up. She said the county would be able to extend deadlines and similar courtesies as long as rebuilders build a paper trail, so to speak, to keep county staff up-to-date on their efforts.

At that same meeting, County Fire's development supervisor, Captain Glenn Fidler, spoke about road regulations and hydrant issues, and reassured his listeners that County Fire would not prevent them from rebuilding. His department would work with individual landowners on a case-by-case basis to arrive at solutions, said Fidler, though required fire hydrants would have to be installed. He outlined a number of creative solutions his team had found for difficult situations, and urged rebuilders confronting road or hydrant issues to contact him: 681-5528, glenn.fidler@sbcfire.com.

The County EmPowerSBC's program manager Angela Hacker also let us know that competitively priced financing may be available to rebuilders, and to refurbishers in general, for green energy, water conservation, and renewables projects. Check out emPowerSBC.org for information or call 568-3520.—*J.Y.*

Rearranging the SBMNH

The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History has been a Mission Canyon institution since its founding in 1916 in an outbuilding on the property of ornithologist William Leon Dawson, a block north of the present day museum. In 1922, Caroline Hazard, owner of what now is St. Mary's Retreat House, gave a portion of her property for the establishment of a museum to study and exhibit California's fauna and flora. Construction began that year on the original structure, which consisted of a central patio surrounded by single rooms for exhibits. An Indian Hall was added in 1926, a botany hall, library, and mammal hall in 1927-28, and a bird hall and laboratories in 1934. The Fleischmann Auditorium was built in 1930.

Although geographically in Mission Canyon, much of the Museum's acreage was annexed by the City in 1968. The City has mandated that the Museum prepare a master

plan for its development in the 21st century. What this plan proposes is to rehabilitate, restore, and revitalize the physical spaces on the campus. The Museum proposes to remove all the post-World War II additions. The structure would be rehabilitated to its original design. A new building to the south on the property where the MacVeagh house now stands is proposed. This new building would provide climate-controlled storage for the Museum's collections, a state-of-the-art research facility, classrooms, and consolidation of the museum's offices for its employees. The MacVeagh house would be moved to the northwest corner of the property.

Other parts of the plan are the restoration of the riparian corridor and the woodland along Mission Creek, making Puesta Del Sol a two-way street with a left-hand turn lane off Mission Canyon Road, and providing safe pedestrian access from the Mission. A fire road is proposed around the Museum's buildings to better protect them and Mission Canyon.—*Kellam de Forest*

Trail Rescues

Not long after the Tunnel Trail reopened in April, the Search and Rescue squad, including Helicopter 309, was called out for rescues on May 4 and 30, and June 23. The first was a mountain biker suffering from dehydration and heat exhaustion, and the other two were young women who fell hard enough to need assistance, one falling 20 feet down the trail. All were treated and released.

Loose rock and dirt, wandering off trails, and being caught out after sunset seem to have been contributing factors in trail rescues on Jesusita and Cold Springs that have combined for a busy early season for SAR.—*J.Y.*

Fires on Foothill

Two fires were reported this spring near Foothill Road. The first was a house fire on April 12 at 795 Mission Oaks Lane, next door to Station 15. Though the fire was knocked down quickly, the house sustained heavy damage throughout. Arson is suspected and the public is asked to come forth with information at (805) 686-5074.

The heavy winds of May and an inadequately extinguished brush burning operation were to blame for the second, a blaze that blew up on Sunday, May 9. The groundsman at 2380 Foothill Road had been trimming the trees, weeds, and grasses on the extensive property. Several pile burns had taken place during the week, when the last was extinguished on Friday, May 7, or so they

thought. High winds two days later brought the fire back to life, and it consumed about a half acre, according to neighbors, before fire crews put it out. The neighbors, MCA, and the county have been discussing the inadvertent brush fire with an eye to modifying burn permit conditions.

No pile burns will happen in the near future, however, as County Fire announced that the high fire season began June 14, 2010. The declaration suspends all burn permits and triggers a heightened response to reports of vegetation fires.—*J.Y.*

Drug Bust

Following a three-month-long investigation, Santa Barbara Sheriff's narcotics detectives arrested six people on the 2000 block of Las Canoas Road for dealing and using methamphetamine. The investigation followed complaints and information from the general public. The bust netted scales, about two ounces of methamphetamine, packaging materials, \$1,200 in cash, and other associated paraphernalia.—*J.Y.*

Spring Errata

Our previous issue mistakenly identified an appellant to the Botanic Garden's development plans as the "Coastal Chumash Band." That party's name is correctly "Frank Arredondo and the Friends of Kashwa." Kashwa is apparently the name of a Chumash village once located where the Botanic Garden now sits.—*J.Y.*

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MISSION CANYON ASSOCIATION

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Your MCA Newsletter Summer 2010

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Botanic Garden
Development Approved.

33 Tons Lighter

Brush Day 2010 on June 12 was a huge success and a fun community event! On June 12, residents removed 33 tons of highly combustible brush from our canyon at no cost thanks to the generous support of our sponsors. Thanks go out to community business supporters MarBorg Industries for trucking and 17 roll-off bins; Dan Upton Construction and Dirk McKnight Construction for donating their personal time and heavy equipment to load brush the whole day; Alastair Winn, Cesar Trujillo, and the S.B. Botanic Garden for supplying trucks to help residents haul brush; Supervisor Salud Carbajal and County Public Works for waiving dump fees; Rockwood Woman's Club for use of their parking lot; and the crew from Fire Station 15 for help with site cleanup. Thanks also go to MCA board members and volunteers Fran Galt, Meghan Williams, and Tony Johansen for all their help.—Milt Roselinski

C A L E N D A R

July 30

The Bride of Frankenstein. Starring Boris Karloff and Elsa Lanchester. 8:30 p.m. S.B. Courthouse Sunken Gardens.

Aug. 1

Greek Festival. 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Oak Park.

Aug. 3

MCA Board of Directors Meeting. All residents welcome. 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta del Sol.

Aug. 4

Fiesta Pequeña. 8 p.m. Old Mission Steps.

Aug. 10

Star Party. Public night sky viewings with Santa Barbara's Astronomical Unit. Sunset to 10 p.m. S.B. Museum of Natural History. Free to members; \$2 adults/\$1 kids.

Aug. 12

Perseid Meteor Shower. Northeast sky beginning around 11 p.m.

Sept. 7

MCA Board Meeting. All residents welcome. 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History.

Oct. 1

Dara Emery Memorial Lecture at SBBG. Robert Perry presents "Better than Gold: The Alchemy of Native Plant Gardens," Blakley Library, 6:30 p.m. Register at 682-4726, ext. 102.

Oct. 2 – Nov. 7

Fall Plant Sale Spectacular. More than 5,000 native and Mediterranean plants for sale at the Botanic Garden. Members enjoy early access and 10% off all nursery and Garden Shop purchases. Members-only preview the day before between 4 and 6 p.m.

Oct. 5

MCA Board Meeting. All residents welcome. 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History.