



In-progress creek restoration with robust natives coming back.

PHOTO: Cass Ensberg



Mission Creek bank and oak overcome with Cape Ivy.

PHOTO: Cass Ensberg

Mission Creek Care

Creekside Dwellers, Make Restoration *Your* Mission

By Cass Ensberg

Without proper management, native trees and plants such as toyon, bay, oak, cottonwood, sycamore, and mugwort that are part of the healthy creek habitat can be overwhelmed by invasive non-natives such as Cape and Algerian Ivy. In big storms, the weakened trees can fall over damaging roadways, property, and the creek bank. Homeowners can better protect their property along Mission Creek and restore the health of the natural habitat by removing invasive plants and replacing them with native species.

For detailed information about creek health and the process of restoration, see the **Santa Barbara County Creek Care Guide**, which is available online (just type the title into your search engine). The **Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Research and Conservation Department** (805-563-0352) is also an excellent resource for information about native plants along our creeks.

What's a WFSBAD?



The high-fire foothill zone of Santa Barbara receives extra attention from City Fire thanks to a special assessment.

PHOTO: Lee Anne Dollison

By Jean Yamamura

If your answer to our title question is the critter that ate the three little pigs, well, you're not even close. The WFSBAD is the City of Santa Barbara's acronym for its high-fire foothill zone and the assessment district it forms. If Mission Canyon were in the city's borders, our entire community would no doubt form the extremely high-fire zone.

But city residents get a lot of bang for the bucks they pay to the Wildland Fire Suppression Benefit Assessment District. You may have noticed the placards on Foothill Road or Alameda Padre Serra that announce an upcoming chipping day. The city's Fire Department organizes regular bouts of mass chipping during which crews cover the foothill area from Ontare to beyond Sycamore Canyon over the course of a month. They gather up and chip all the brush homeowners have left piled for them in their driveways or beside the road. The crews even give residents the choice of having the chips hauled away or left behind to be spread on the property.

Special Duty

Two specialists working for City Fire organize these projects, with their paychecks coming from the city's General Fund as

well as money from the assessment district. Among her many city-wide duties, Ann Marx, a wildland fire specialist, develops the defensible space game plan for areas like Skofield Park and the city water system that are integral spaces in Mission Canyon owned by the city. Most recently, goats eating the brush at St. Mary's Seminary and contractors cutting and chipping in the Skofield area reduced the fuel on about 25 acres.

The city's high-fire zone benefits from its size. It has about three times the number of homes in Mission Canyon, which gives them the economy of scale of an assessment rate of roughly \$69 per property. Shaggy WFSBAD public roads, about 54 miles worth, get a shave and a haircut to the tune of 10 feet on the sides and 13.5 feet up top on a tri-annual basis as compared to our 8.8 miles of road that were last treated in 2006. And, to keep smoke and flames away from cars and residents during fire emergency evacuations, City Fire focuses on getting rid of dead material along the sides of the roads, highly flammable plants like juniper, and any vegetation that creates fire ladders up into the tree canopies—including hedges.

Keeping grasses down falls to the homeowners. Fire Services Specialist Amber Anderson answers all questions city residents have about who has to do what. Anderson works full-time organizing, publicizing, and managing road clearing projects and the chipping projects, which are generally carried out by contractors, not city workers, and she answered plenty of questions about the city's initiative when it first got underway in 2007.

The wolf analogy above isn't that far off from how vulnerable canyon residents should feel as we watch the chaparral come galloping back. And when the wind blows hot and dry, even in the spring after record amounts of rain, the possibility of wildfire feels all the more real. Sitting smack-dab in the center of the city's busy WFSBAD clearing, cutting, and chipping projects, Mission Canyon is sort of like a crater of untended flammability.

The City of Santa Barbara is tackling its high-fire zone with extra services paid by WFSBAD fees. Though supplemented by about \$200,000 from the city's General Fund, the fees give the city's high-fire foothill area a dependable budget to use for vegetation management—the key to community-wide fire safety.

In Mission Canyon, most residents clear the space around their homes, but acres and

acres of the front country remain untamed, except by the Jesusita Fire. A wildland fire assessment would give serious protection to all canyon residents and their homes and properties.

The Bottom Line

Our small assessment base compared to the city's (1,104 properties versus 3,500) means it's likely that we'll contribute more for similar services. County Fire and City Fire have been meeting to plug in numbers for personnel and services to see if Mission Canyon can afford it. County general fund money will probably not be available because, frankly, Mission Canyon is just a small fraction of the County of Santa Barbara, and the county also has a \$72 million budget deficit.

In order to get the same protection our neighbors in the city have, our community must come up with supplemental funds so that our neighborhoods get the same services city dwellers have. The choice is an assessment to have regular fire management work versus the ever-growing chaparral flaming into a fire like Jesusita and destroying our homes again. That fee would be our best defense against wildfire ... and we aren't crying wolf.

Thank You, Members

Thanks to all of you who have already sent your dues in for 2011. The \$35 membership fee is probably one of the best bargains in today's market. For only \$35, you get 15 board volunteers working diligently to keep your homes safer and to protect this beautiful place where we live.

We have been especially touched by the thank-you notes attached to your dues and to the many who have donated beyond the \$35. As of press time, we have 312 dues-paying members (out of 1,104 residents) and 26 who have donated even more than we asked. We thank you all for your support.

For those who have misplaced their dues notice, please send \$35 to MCA, PO Box 401, Santa Barbara, CA 93102. Be sure to include your name and address for our records; any new email and phone information helps us stay in touch, too. We used this info to contact people after the fire. It is never shared.



The new turnstile at the Botanic Garden's front gate keeps count of visitors as they come and go.

PHOTO: Lee Anne Dollison

A Sea Change

When the lower Tunnel Road gate was left unlocked, Mission Canyon got its first inkling that change might be more than just talk at the Botanic Garden. MCA boardmembers soon learned from Garden director Steve Windhager that the open gate policy will be followed this year by the removal of chainlink fencing, erection of a weather station on Cavalli Hill before high fire season, and the restoration of the meadow.

Since December, Windhager's arrival has seen the departures of Fife Symington as chair of the Garden's board and Nancy Johnson as highly paid public relations mouthpiece. In a complete reversal of policy, the Garden began actively asking for the community's opinion with an online questionnaire, and Windhager has held numerous community meetings on the Garden's future. Even more telling, 28-year Garden veteran Carol Bornstein, who was fired when Garden finances were said to be getting tight, will be teaching upcoming classes on native plants and giving the Dara Emery Lecture in the fall. Word in the neighborhood is that the Garden's steadfast gardeners are happy to be back in the business of plants and that the docents have ended their strike and returned to the Garden.

Though we all had heard that former director Ed Schneider's house had burned in Jesusita, what most of us did not know was that he was then housed at the Guild Studio and that it underwent extensive renovations

to suit the Schneiders. Now a comfortable home, the Guild Studio would be more useful to the Garden, explained Windhager, as housing for Garden employees on a permanent basis than as office space. Use of the Guild Studio as a residence also means there would be no need for a paved parking lot at the Las Canoas and Mission Canyon Road intersection, which was required in the new Conditional Use Permit (CUP). MCA's board wholeheartedly agreed that this would be a change for the better, and this revision is currently going through county Planning.

In other news regarding the Garden's CUP and expansion, zoning clearance was accomplished by January, and infrastructure work may break ground as early as this fall. Windhager promises that Mission Canyon Road neighbors will be kept apprised of the timeline for the planned water and sewer roadwork.

Museum of Natural History Expansion

Planning continues for the badly needed rehabilitation of the Museum of Natural History with community involvement taking place each step of the way. Alastair Winn, Tom Jacobs, and Kellam de Forest are the MCA representatives working with the museum on this project. Feel free to contact them for further information. You can also find up-to-date information on the museum website sbnature.org. All community input is welcome.

Mission Canyon Community Plan

The Mission Canyon Community Plan is currently undergoing environmental review. The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) has been available for residents to study and to give comments. The deadline for public comments is April 27. They may be submitted in writing via mail or email. Contact Rosie Dyste at rdyste@co.santa-barbara.ca.us or at 568-3532 for further details. Those of you living in Mission Canyon Heights may want to read this document carefully because your parking patterns will be affected.

Roadwork Alert!

It's become a Brush Day tradition for the Guerilla Gardeners to get out alongside the roads and weed, rake, plant, and otherwise beautify a neglected corridor of our scenic

Mission Canyon roads. On Saturday, June 11, as you drive along during your busy day, be aware that a few busy gardeners will be working hard near the road and please give them some room. Thank you.

Fremontia

This stunning California native, *Fremontodendron californicum* (pictured below), is covered with deep sunny yellow blooms amid its grey-green leaves in the spring. It's a dryland native that likes slopes, gravel, and rocky humps, and is favored by bees and ants, which redistribute its seeds. Also called "flannelbush" and "Fremontia," the plant is "recommended for use in fire-prone environments" by the UC Forest Products Lab.



PHOTO: Cass Ensberg

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The MCA Newsletter was prepared with the help of Lee Anne Dollison, graphics, production and photography.



MISSION CANYON ASSOCIATION

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Your MCA Newsletter Spring 2011

Mission Creek Restoration Brush Day, June 11!

Brush Day Is June 11

Mark your calendar! MCA's annual Brush Day will be held on Saturday, June 11. This is the day that all paid members (another reason to pay your dues) can bring any amount of brush—but not yucca, palm, ivy, succulents, or ice plant because the dump won't take them—to the parking lot at Rockwood Woman's Club. At Rockwood, you'll find MCA volunteers and MarBorg Industries and their donated trucks, backhoes, roll-offs, and workers taking your brush to the dump free of charge.

Make your gardening plans now to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to make your home and your neighbors' homes safer. With all the rain this year, the weeds and brush are higher than ever!

We would love to have more volunteers to help us that day. If you can spare a few hours (it's really fun), contact Milt Rose-linsky.

C A L E N D A R

- April 30** **Fire Following: Longer Legacies.** Hike Alisos Loop of Los Padres National Forest (Santa Ynez) with Bruce Reed, SBBG arborist and nursery manager, to view effects five years after Zaca Fire. 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. 682-4726.
- May 1** **Deadline for SBBG Mother's Day Contest.** Win a Garden Prize Package worth \$300. Call the Botanic Garden, 682-4726, for more information.
- May 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 Rd.
- May 21** **Butterflies Alive.** Returns to the S.B. Natural History Museum. Interested in volunteering? Call Rebecca at 682-4711, ext. 107.
- May 21** **Boulders and Blooms: Geology and Native Plant Hike.** Learn about the geology and plants of our own Tunnel Trail as you hike with Botanic Garden experts. Register online at sbbg.org under Classes, or call 682-4726 for information.
- May 26 – Sept. 25** **RACE: Are We So Different?** S.B. Natural History Museum. A new exhibit developed by the American Anthropological Association in collaboration with the Science Museum of Minnesota. See sbnature.org or call 682-4711 for more information.
- June 7** **MCA Board of Directors Meeting.** All residents welcome. 7:30 p.m. MacVeagh House, S.B. Museum of Natural History.
- June 11** **MCA Brush Day.** S.B. Woman's Club parking lot, Rockwood. For MCA members only. Dues accepted at the parking lot (\$35). Residents using contractors, please come to Rockwood with the first load to verify residence. Volunteers welcome. 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.