

Fall 2012

Brush Goats and Arborists Start Grant Work

By Laurie Guitteau

At long last, we are moving ahead with implementing our Fire Safe Council Grant. It took six months to get our environmental clearance from the Bureau of Land Management and another three months to get some actual money in the coffers.

On July 30 we were lucky enough to have the CalFire Hotshot Crew come and clear the castor bean forest on Palomino Road. Suddenly available, this army of orange descended upon a forest of castor bean plants 8-9 feet tall on Monday morning, and by Monday afternoon, we had a bare hollow that no one had seen for years.

Our tree removal began right after Labor Day. A group of dead eucalyptus trees that could have blocked evacuation if they toppled were removed on Las Canoas and at the Tunnel Trailhead. Dead growth and overhanging trees and debris that could have impeded evacuation were removed along Tunnel Road and on Holly Road

The major part of our work is scheduled to begin the last week of September. Our little four-footed friends return to the canyon to munch their way to our safety. Ian Newsom and Lorraine Argo, owners of Brush Goats 4 Hire, are looking forward to working with Mission Canyon residents again. Most of us credit the work of the goats during the last grant for saving many homes that would have otherwise burned.

The goats' work begins at the trailhead where they will spend approximately one month. The goats will be penned with a clearly marked netting-style pen that is electrified with solar panels and guarded from predators by specially trained dogs who protect them from coyotes, bobcats, and domestic dogs. These dogs are predator control dogs, not pets. They are raised with the goats, live with the goats, and their job is to protect the goats from any and all predators, including you and your dog. (Go to MissionCanyon.org for a video of the dogs and goats made by Cate School students.) It is imperative that no one feed these dogs or the goats. They are on a special diet and should never have any sort of

other food no matter how small a tidbit nor how tempting.

We need your help to protect the goats and the dogs. Lorraine and Ian stress that domestic dogs are the biggest threat to the goats and their work. We are most concerned about their time at the trailhead. Even the most well-behaved dogs generally bark and may lunge at the goats and their pens, sometimes damaging the pens.

The predator control dogs could harm people and their pets if they appear to be endangering the goats or if they enter the pen. These dogs are not vicious, but they have a job to do. We will have as many signs as possible at the trailhead telling people to keep their dog on-leash until well beyond the goats. Lorraine said the last time they were here, they even provided leashes for people to use. Problem was that people never returned them, so all the leashes disappeared the first few days. Even their signs were taken the last time.

How can you help? We ask every resident to join the guard dogs in protecting the goats. If you are at the trailhead or anywhere else the goats are working, watch to be sure anyone with a dog has that dog on a leash. Explain the importance of keeping the dog leashed until well past the goats and re-leashing on the way down. Make sure no one, adults or children, feeds or attempts to feed the guard dogs or the goats. You can get more details about the goats, the dogs, and their work at brushgoats4hire.com.

We are contacting as many hiking groups as we can, but if you know of hiking groups or hiking websites, send the contact details to Laurie at guitteau@cox.net, and we will enlist their help. If you have friends who regularly walk their dogs on Tunnel Trail, please spread the word.

After the Trailhead, the goats will move to Palomino Road, where they will work for approximately two weeks, then on to lower Laurel Canyon, along upper Holly Road,



Goats clearing brush on Wood-Claeysens property earlier this summer.
PHOTO: Lee Anne Dollison

where they will work for approximately three weeks. All in all, we expect the goats to be working somewhere in the canyon from late September until December. You may see Ian and Lorraine's vehicles with or without their livestock trailers parked in various spots in the canyon during this time. They have special permits to park in some areas otherwise posted "no parking" in order to get their equipment and stock in and out, so please do not call the CHP. They are always nearby to move their vehicles in case of emergency.

Hand crews will follow the goats to remove brush too thick or heavy for them. We will be able to assess that work once the goats have cleared the underbrush.

Thanks, everyone. All of this is very exciting, especially since we've been ready to work since January and now can actually get started. But, the most impressive thing has been the response from all of you. Neighbor after neighbor has sent us in-kind contributions of work they have done and paid for within the project areas of our grant. Every time one of you pitches in, it means that we can accomplish even more with the \$67,000 that we have. The hours of volunteer time being spent implementing this grant are hours of pleasure because we are working with a community that genuinely works together for the safety of all.

Lop and Chop — Preparing for the Wildfire Cycle

By Laurie Guitteau

After one of the sunniest summers in recent memories, September is here, and with it we begin the peak of our traditional fire season. Though fire season is now an all-year condition, most of us old timers still worry most in September and October when things are driest and the winds return. A new study shows home losses are greater in areas with a history of fire, and that makes old hands of us all when it comes to knowing where fire will return.

The study by scientists Alexandra Syphard and Jon Keeley from the U.S. Geological Survey debunks the myth that once a fire burns through a canyon, it won't happen again because the fuel is spent. (See pasadenastarnews.com and search "syphard.") Looking at wildfire history in regions of Southern California, the researchers tried to determine what caused the greatest structure loss and came up with arrangement and location of structures, fire history of the area, a surrounding of wildland vegetation, and vegetation type.

As with any new research findings, the study has evoked some controversy, even at our local Fire Safe Council. There, the observation that more homes are lost to herbaceous fuels — think grasses — than woody fuels because the moisture content in grasses is so low and they burn so rapidly was met with the argument that grasses flame up and out quickly, thus presenting less of a problem than chaparral which usually flings embers in a high-wind fire. (To read the study, go to PLoSone.org and search "Housing Location Factors Determine Risk.")

More important to policy makers might be the view that land use policies decide where structures may be built and that those decisions need to consider an area's fire history. For homeowners in Mission Canyon, however, the map is written, property lines exist, foundations are dug in. But the conversation has begun, and perhaps before the next fire Planning and Development will have a more enlightened view on where a house should be rebuilt.

As for what we can do now, the two fire ecologists' studies show that the heavy chaparral burned in California fires is replaced with grasses and lightweight plants that ignite more quickly than chaparral. Anyone who has hiked Rattlesnake or Tunnel Trail recently can confirm these findings. Mother Nature's resiliency after the Jesusita Fire continues to amaze us all. In most areas, it is difficult to believe we had a major fire just three years ago because there is hardly a



House on Las Alturas burning during the Tea Fire.

PHOTO: Eli Iskow

trace of that holocaust remaining. Instead the vegetation is as hardy as ever, and much of it is grass-like. A day of hiking our local trails quickly reminds you that we remain vulnerable to fire.

The researchers also say "a structure's survival during a wildfire depends largely on its building materials and the characteristics of fuels in its immediate surroundings, suggesting that fire hazard can be reduced by homeowner actions to protect the structure." Most of us can't afford to rebuild our home of more fire-resistant materials, but there is some general housekeeping we can all do to make our property more fire resistant.

The first step is to step outside your house. Do you see tree limbs close to your roof? Is dead vegetation on ornamental plants close to your house? Are there dead branches and leaves in your trees? Trim, trim, trim!

How about the road in front of your property? Or your driveway? If you were a fire engine driver, would you have complete access?

Pretend you're an ember looking for a place to land. Is there some nice dry, tall "herbaceous fuel" nearby that would spark up easily? How much damage could you do?

Now look up at the roof of your house. Do you see pine needles or dead leaves piled up in the valleys or gutters? That makes good kindling for a stray ember. While you're looking at your roof, check the vents to be sure the screens have no holes and completely cover the vent. One house here in the canyon appeared to have come through the fire unscathed. Instead, the interior had been destroyed by fire that entered through a vent.

Take a walk around your house. Mentally assess the flammables that are too close to the house. Plastics (garbage bins, lawn chairs, kids' toys) that the wind can push around were big culprits in the Tea Fire. Check the underside of your deck. Can fire get underneath? Make sure you don't make it even easier by storing flammable things under your deck or by having dead or flammable vegetation under there.

Now look at those you love. Do you all know where to meet in case of an emergency? Do you have Fido evacuation plans in place? How about your elderly mother? Important documents ready to grab in a hurry? (Better yet, in a safety deposit box elsewhere.) That learning experience we all had three years ago taught us that we might not be able to go home again for a long time. For more help, the Santa Barbara County Fire website has detailed suggestions for preparing your house and your family. (Go to sbcfire.com, or visit Station 15 on Foothill Road.)

Last, those folks who lost their homes to fire will tell you that it is expensive to rebuild here in Santa Barbara, especially if you live on any kind of a slope. Review your fire insurance policy. Is it adequate for current building costs? For some, the insurance horror stories continue even to this day.

Yes, it's been an exceptional summer. Just as the kids must face homework as they return to school, let's do our homework so that we can relax and enjoy a lovely fall, prepared for the worst, but expecting the best in our little corner of paradise. And let's hope that Mission Canyon will not support Syphard and Keeley's research findings.



Making Foothill safer for pedestrians, Caltrans workers painted a crosswalk at the intersection with Mission Canyon Road.

PHOTO: Cass Ensberg

Celebrating the Small Things!

We hope you all have noticed and used the new pedestrian crosswalk at Mission Canyon and Foothill Road. Mission Canyon Association board members worked diligently with Caltrans and our Supervisor, Salud Carbajal, to realize this long-awaited improvement. The crosswalk and repositioning of the wheel stop line to align properly with the corner have transformed the intersection. Vehicles are less prone to roll through, and pedestrians have a clear place to cross. The area is safer for all and just in time for the beginning of school! It a delight to see neighbors out walking and to experience the big difference such small changes can make. —Cass Ensberg

Eat and Be Eaten Season

Not only is the vegetation back, so is the wildlife. Bobcats have been sighted up and down the canyon; coyotes have been making their presence known these warm nights, though the howling is not at the pitch it was before the fire. Numerous residents have reported dead, missing, or mauled dogs and cats in the past few weeks, preyed upon during the night and the day. So if you have pets, keep them from being an easy meal; let's keep the local predators on their helpful diet of rodents! —LG

Las Canoas Closed

Through traffic should avoid Las Canoas Road until January 2013. That's when con-

struction on a water main should end, and the road reopen. Residents have been dealing with the narrowed road as the work has descended from the Sheffield end toward Mission Canyon Road since August. Should an emergency evacuation occur, the contractor will move equipment aside and cover the trench, but residents should be aware that the work might delay them and plot other escape routes now.

Full details and weekly updates are at santabarbaraca.gov/engineering at "Major Construction and Design Maps" by clicking the little yellow hardhat at Skofield Park. If you have concerns or questions, the on-duty project engineer can be called at 729-3442. During non-work hours, the emergency number is 963-4286. —JY

Garden-Whys Committee

The Garden Committee has a new name and a new focus. Fire safety, erosion prevention, privacy, water consumption, invasive plants, and conscientious brush removal are just a few of the challenges that face all of us as we strive to create a healthy urban interface around our homes. The Mission Canyon Garden-Whys Committee wants to create a dialog and strategies with homeowners to find healthy solutions for landscaping challenges while respecting individual choices and gardening styles.

The committee is made up of passionate gardeners: Bruce Reed, a Botanic Garden staff member; Fran Galt, a longtime Mission Canyon resident working to restore creek habitat at her property; Cass Ensberg, also a canyon resident, architect, and artist; and myself, a retired environmental educator and docent/volunteer grower at the Garden. We urge others to join us to make the Mission Canyon community a model of living in harmony with nature. Please contact me at sunraysue@gmail.com if you would like to serve on this committee. —Susan Davidson

State Responsibility Area Fee

Like other state agencies, CalFire lost millions when California had to close a \$15 billion budget gap this year and about \$25 billion the year before. To raise some hoped-for revenue, a fee on structures in the State Responsibility Area (SRA), which is all of Mission Canyon north of Foothill Road, is being imposed by the state. Since we help support the Santa Barbara County Fire Department

with our county taxes, the SRA fee of \$150 is reduced by \$35.

It's difficult to say whether the State Board of Equalization will ever send out the bills for Santa Barbara County. They have about 850,000 to process and have apparently gotten to the counties that start with C. Meanwhile, the Jarvis anti-taxes group threatens to sue on the grounds that the fee is really a tax and needs to be approved by a two-thirds vote, and two legislators have sponsored laws to repeal the fee. See firepreventionfee.org for more, or call (888) 310-6447. —JY

Safe Passage

The condition of the pedestrian way from the Rose Garden to the Natural History Museum can be a rough and tumble affair. A diverse group of people have worked to figure out what lies there and what can be done about it. No room here for it all, but please take a look at MissionCanyon.org for more on Safe Passage. —JY



A sample of the many signs in the area.

PHOTO: Concerned Citizens for Safe Passage Working Group

MCA Officers & Directors

- Barbara Lindemann:** President; lindebar@gmail.com
- Laurie Guiteau:** Vice President; Membership*, Newsletter; 682-4474, guitteau@cox.net
- Jean Yamamura:** Treasurer; Fire, Newsletter*, Ordinance; 845-3051, jean.yamamura@gmail.com
- Ray Smith:** Secretary; Fire; 682-5583, ray@eri.ucsb.edu
- Richard Axilrod:** Museum, Traffic & Parking*; 687-5296, sbbaldy@gmail.com
- Ralph Daniel:** Fire, Mediation*, Ordinance; T&P; 682-2889, rdaniel@fambus.com
- Susan Davidson:** Garden-Whys*; 770-2713, susan@sbms.org
- Kellam de Forest:** History, Museum; deforek@aol.com
- Alex Feldwinn:** Webmaster*; alexanderfeldman@gmail.com
- Darby Feldwinn:** 845-6522, feldwinn@chem.ucsb.edu
- Tom Jacobs:** ADRC*, Museum; 898-8004, tomejd@cox.net
- Milt Roselinsky:** Fire*; 563-9212, milt.roselinsky@cox.net
- Kevin Snow:** Land Use*; 448-6653, haybam@cox.net
- Richard Solomon:** Museum; rsolomon2@cox.net
- Alastair Winn:** Museum*; 687-5682, alastair@appliedsilicone.com

*Chair of committee

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

Board meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at the Natural History Museum's MacVeagh House. All are welcome to attend.



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Now in **Color!**

Outdoor Lighting in Mission Canyon: Safety, Light Pollution, and the Night Sky

By Tom Jacobs

A mere stone's throw from the bright lights of downtown, semi-rural Mission Canyon enjoys the wonder of the night sky and is a haven for wildlife. Our steeply sloped area has until recently been devoid of streetlights, security lighting systems, and landscaping up-lighting. In the aftermath of the Jesusita Fire, many new structures have been erected to replace those lost to fire. In addition, canyon residents are choosing to stay and upgrade their older homes. This unusual spate of new construction in the context of sparser greenery has led to a dramatic increase in exterior lighting visible from neighboring properties.

All exterior doors must have a nearby placed exterior light, according to the 2010 California Electrical Code (Title 24, Part 3, Article 210.70(A)(2)(b)). The intent of this provision is to insure a safely lit transition from indoors to outdoors for general and emergency nighttime use. In our Mediterranean climate, a strong indoor-outdoor relationship can generate lots of exterior doors. Not uncommonly, both the social areas (liv-

ing and dining rooms and kitchens) and the private areas (bedrooms and bathrooms) of a home will have doors that open to outside decks and patios; each of these openings is required to be lit.

County Zoning Ordinance 35.30.120 applies to outdoor lighting for all types of development: "All exterior lighting shall be hooded and no unobstructed beam of exterior light shall be directed toward any area zoned or developed residential ... and lighting shall be designed so as not to interfere with vehicular traffic on any portion of a street." For public facilities (Section 35.36.080) like the Botanic Garden, it states, "parking areas serving uses operating at night shall be adequately lighted. Lighting shall be directed away from adjoining residences."

The proposed Mission Canyon Residential Design Guidelines provide more detail to these succinct requirements. The Guidelines state, "outdoor lighting should not intrude into neighboring properties; and ... requires all outdoor lighting to be fully shielded, and be contained in the site of origin." It prompts the owner to "control glare ... and ... install minimum lighting necessary for security

and safety," noting that this "fosters good neighborhood relations." California Title 24 requires either fluorescent (high efficacy) lighting or photocell-controlled switches; unfortunately animals may trigger the latter.

Lighting should be placed in the lowest possible location (step lights can be used and are very unobtrusive), and translucent or opaque materials should be used with lighting directed down and fully shielded to the maximum extent possible. The new Guidelines prohibit landscape up-lighting and call attention to exposed hillside and ridgeline structures, which can spill light in many directions.

As you chose to rebuild or remodel, remember that in terms of outdoor lighting, less is best. A romantic pool of low-level light can guide your steps and contribute to an enjoyable experience for owner and neighbor alike. Think "candles and moonlight" to help preserve the night sky we are fortunate to share in Mission Canyon.

For more information, please refer to the consumer guides and practical advice offered by the International Dark Sky Association (www.darksky.org).