

Spring 2012

High Fire Season Returns

by Jean Yamamura

Though the area east of Cold Spring Creek may be most vulnerable to wild-fire this season, the areas of Mission Canyon that didn't burn during Jesusita are too, or at least that's our take on the message from the county fire chiefs' media event and barbecue in May. What this means, of course, is that everyone with plants and trees that need cleaning up — palms with dead fronds hanging low and bougainvillea loaded with dead flowers come to mind — should get out there and get it done. MCA's Brush Day is just around the corner: Saturday, June 9, this year in a new location, the Mormon Church parking lot on Los Olivos Street.

The fire department was pleased that late-season rains brought plant moisture levels

up. The bad news was that the prolonged summer-fall-winter drought meant less overall moisture in the ground, and high fire season is expected to be, well, rather volatile this year. It's off to a fine start with Red Flag days being called even before the season officially began.

But there's more good news! Santa Maria Airport, which is where the air support tankers load up with fire retardant, has been returned to full service status for this fire season. Additionally, County Fire Chief Michael Dyer, with the help of Dennis Bozanich of the County CEO's office, forcefully persuaded the county supervisors to ratchet up our Fire Department's portion of the county tax pot to 17 percent from its previous 11.97 percent. Nearby communities give their fire

departments 16 percent (Montecito) and 17 percent (Los Angeles) of the tax they're entitled to. The additional funds will go to training, equipment, and manpower, all of which were in danger of being marginalized.

With the fire chiefs announcing high fire season as of May 25 this year, burn permits are cancelled. For the rest of us, it's time to re-evaluate the homestead, make sure you know where everything you love is located, place the valuables somewhere handy for fast evacuation, and maybe make some of those changes you've been thinking about. As Geri Ventura of Montecito Fire explained at the chiefs' lunch, there's only one engine for every 8,800 residents on the South Coast. We should all take heed; a little "fire hard-

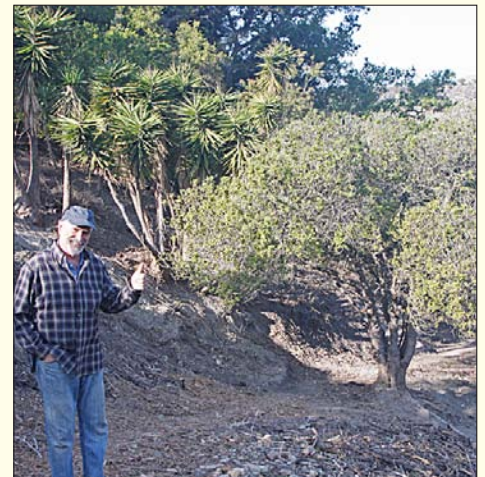
High Fire (cont. p.2)

Banding Together

by Laurie Guitteau

After the Jesusita Fire, the residents on Arriba Way banded together to make their homes safer. A steep embankment rises from the canyon to the east of the Lauro Canyon Reservoir to their homes, the kind of hill fires love to climb. It was in this canyon that the fire raged through, destroying so many homes on Holly and Palomino roads. Firefighting crews stopped the fire at the base of the canyon with a firebreak. Thankful to have escaped the fire against these high odds, residents decided to take action. With some match from a previous Fire Safe Council Grant, the neighbors adjacent to the hillside pitched in monetarily to have our beloved goats tackle the steepest parts, followed by hand crews to do the rest. In addition, they negotiated a multi-year contract at their own expense to have the hand crew return each year. This is truly community in action with everyone working together to improve safety.

This year, one of the grant projects is another very steep bowl between Holly and Palomino roads. Property owners were



Before (left) and after (right) evidence of the hard work done by Brush Goats 4 Hire on the hillside below Arriba Way. The goats ate enough undergrowth beneath the trees to allow hand crews to work unobstructed.

PHOTOS: Ralph Daniel

contacted and a very successful meeting was held. It was an opportunity to meet neighbors, not easy when we are so spread apart, and to develop a plan to work together to make the entire area safer. Again, we will use a combination of goats and hand crews to clear the amazing amount of vegetation that has returned since the fire, all financed with grant money and property

owners' participation. Hopefully, a long-term plan can be developed among the property owners.

We hope that there are other communities of property owners who would like to develop a similar plan. We cannot promise grant money, but we can promise

Banding Together (cont. p.2)

High Fire (cont. from p.1)

ening” of our homes might make the difference between there being a home rather than a blackened mass when you return from the inevitable evacuation.

For instance, even if your home sits shoulder-to-shoulder with your neighbors’, you can make small changes to help fire harden it. Take a look at your vents; now take a look online for “ember intrusion vent.” They’re well worth the \$50 price tag. These vents keep embers out of your attic and crawl spaces, and embers (blown by 65mph sun-downers) are what start house fires.

Actually, houses are one of the prime ember-creators once they themselves are engulfed in fire. To prevent that, attic sprinklers are a new favorite fire-fighting tool. Another is the less-flammable fence, either coated with flame-resistant paint or made of a non-flammable material like concrete. One of those between your home and whatever’s on

fire will help hold the heat down and delay combustion. (See sbcfire.com for lots more information.)

But nothing works as well as maintaining a perimeter around your house that’s clear of the sort of vegetation that will allow fire to crawl up onto your home, i.e., dead, resinous,

or combustible stuff. If you had an outdoor birthday party for your 70-year-old mother and the fully lit cake tipped over, would the yard catch fire? If the answer is yes, you have a problem. Did I mention that Brush Day is Saturday, June 9? Mormon church parking lot. Be there.

Banding Together (cont. from p.1)

support. Talk to your neighbors, and if you want help, contact Laurie Guitteau, guitteau@cox.net or 682-4474

Speaking of the grant. No, we have not been just sitting on our thumbs. Believe it or not, we are still waiting for the Bureau of Land Management environmental report, without which we can do nothing. Very frustrating! As we all know, government services have been drastically cut, and this is one of the results. Just as soon as we get

the report, we are ready to hit the ground running.

Meanwhile, don’t forget about matching in-kind funds that you can provide. If you live in any of the project areas, which include all the major roads: Tunnel, Mission Canyon, Cheltenham, and Las Canoas, and do any work within 20 feet of these roads, we can count your time or your money toward our match. Remember we must match dollar for dollar, so every little bit helps. Contact Laurie if you have questions or do have a match.

NEWS IN BRIEF

SBBG Update

As the Botanic Garden swings into full bloom, plans are steaming ahead for the east side and conceptual work on the conservation center. Though a total of 14,000 square feet in structures was approved, the Garden is looking to scale that back to a single structure of 10,000-11,000 square feet. Executive Director Steve Windhager explains that they hope to incorporate a demonstration gallery with windows into the conservation labs to show the significant work the SBBG does. There, staff and volunteers may be seen preparing herbarium samples, processing seeds, and researching the Garden’s inventory of rare and endangered species from the Central Coast bioregion.



“Raspberries” (detail) by Kathleen Crocetti, from a series of stained glass works on view at S.B. Botanic Garden from June 15 through September 3.

PHOTO: Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

New Faces

Every few years, the County Fire Department rotates people through its Vegetation Management Section, Fire Prevention Division. MCA has worked closely with these folks, most recently Capt. Bob Tanner, who helped us scope the canyon for potential hot spots and grant projects and also gave us invaluable knowhow for the canyon’s Community Wildfire Protection Plan. As Capt. Tanner heads to Station 24 in Los Alamos, Capt. Steve Oaks takes his place in the section, along with Scot Alderete, who will coordinate defensible space work for County Fire. Capt. Oaks has worked every firehouse in the county over his 25-year career and serves on the CalFire Incident Command Team. We all will no doubt meet the new team in the coming year.

Station 15 News

Captain Dustin McKibbon of Station 15 reported that defensible space inspections have begun. They had delayed a bit this year because of the late rains, but it is critical that all property owners make their homes as fire safe as possible. The law requires 100 feet of defensible space around all structures.

Clearing an area of 30 feet immediately surrounding your home is critical. Walk around the perimeter of your structures visualizing the winds and embers of the Jesuita Fire. Do you have vegetation next to the house that could become a torch? Be espe-

cially aware of vegetation near vents, under eaves, all the places fires love.

Create horizontal and vertical spacing between plants for the remainder of the 70 feet. Actually, try to do that with all of the vegetation on your property; don’t limit yourself to 70 feet. Be sure that trees are kept clear of all dead matter and that plants beneath them cannot form a ladder for fire. Trees must be

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*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.

A Rare and Succulent Garden

by Laurie Guitteau

Remember our neighbors who give us delight with Santa, the Easter Bunny, and a Halloween witch? Behind their beautiful sculpted gate, at 2709 Foothill, lies a unique garden lovingly designed and maintained by Evelyn Jacob and Mindy Rosenblatt. It rivals Lotusland with an impressive collection of prehistoric cycads as well as themed beds of succulent and cacti. Nothing is haphazard in this garden, yet it flows so naturally, combining quartz, marbles, stones, even bowling balls with pathways, fencing, and plants to form a work of art—at times serious, at times whimsical—that invites you to stay and savor.

The property greets you with a sun-dappled front garden thoughtfully planted in succulents of otherworldly shapes. Rows of barrel cactus add pattern, as a bed of marbles (far right) adds whimsy. ▶

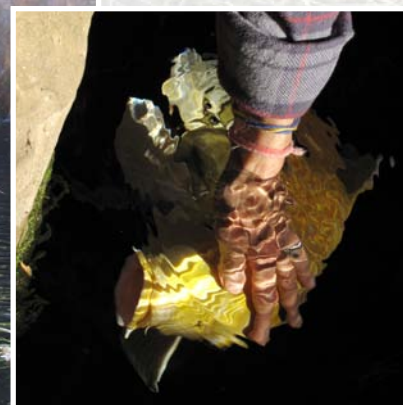
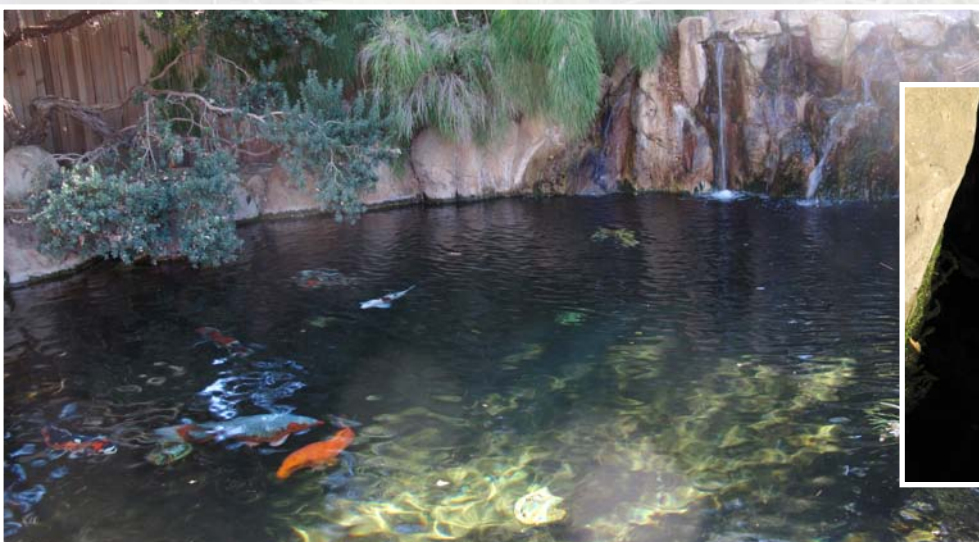


Evelyn and Mindy designed raised beds for vegetables using concrete and copper that are snail and gopher proof. Not only are they functional, but the placement of these beds is another work of art. Along the fence is a gutter garden, the latest experiment for these talented women. ▼



◀ Leaving the succulent garden, Evelyn leads us into the back garden through a tropical forest of rare cycads, whose ancestors date directly back to the age of dinosaurs. In contrast to the sculpted front garden it's almost a shock.

Emerging from the tropical forest, you come upon the koi pond with the largest, healthiest koi you have ever seen. Evelyn pets one of their favorites (below right). The design of this lovely pool was an engineering and environmental challenge to keep the koi safe from predators, but it is the centerpiece of the lush back garden that is also in complete contrast to the water-thrifty front garden. ▼



PHOTOS: Lee Anne Dollison



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Your MCA Newsletter Spring 2012

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A Rare and Succulent Garden (p. 3)

BRUSH DAY! • JUNE 9! • NEW LOCATION! • 2107 Santa Barbara St. • Enter on Los Olivos St.

News (cont. from p.2)

at least 10 feet from any chimneys, and you certainly do not want dead branches hanging over any structures.

Make sure your driveway or private road is clear of vegetation that would impede your escape in an emergency. In addition to clearing, it is critical that you keep gutters and roofs clear of dead leaves and needles throughout fire season. For more detailed information go to sbcfire.com. Better yet, invite Station 15 to your home to give you a personal evaluation of what you can do to be more fire safe. Call them at 681-5515 to schedule an appointment.

Community Plan Delayed

The Mission Canyon Planning Advisory Committee (MCPAC) had hoped that the Mission Canyon Community Plan would be finalized last fall, allowing them to get back to the non-governmental parts of their lives. Unfortunately or fortunately, about 13 individuals, agencies, and attorneys wrote in to comment on the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) phase, most criticizing the traffic studies, and one, from the Natu-

ral History Museum's attorneys, bringing up the fact that the baseline population was out of whack and also that the traffic details were inconsistent between the two documents.

County planning and legal staff mulled these issues over the course of eight months, finally letting the public know in March 2012 that the EIR would need to be redone. Apparently, because the Jesusita Fire had destroyed 68 homes in Mission Canyon and because the Community Plan's baseline population was from 2007, counsel decided that it was too speculative to assume that all 68 homes would be rebuilt by the time the Plan would finally be approved. Planning staff determined recently that all but 14 homes were somewhere in the planning process and that it might be spring of 2013 before the Community Plan is approved.

In the new EIR, staff will address the inconsistencies and other issues. Transportation consultants Fehr & Peers (F&P) will be redoing their traffic and evacuation computations based upon a new baseline. F&P will also take the parking load at the Tunnel Trailhead into consideration in the new

studies and reevaluate evacuation south of Foothill Road.

Of the fire losses, Planning staff have found that, as of April 11, 2012, 26 homes have been rebuilt and passed their final Building and Safety inspection, 14 units have building permits and are in the construction process, six units have building permits in the plan-check review process, three units have land use permits but no building permits, three units have land use permits in process, 14 units have no permits or construction activity, and two units, which belong to the Botanic Garden, will not be rebuilt.

Did You Lose a Cat?

Folks in the 2600 block of Montrose report a gorgeous, long-haired black cat who now is almost feral. They are wondering if this cat could have been lost during the fire and called on us to put out the word in case someone did lose a beautiful black cat. He seems too pretty not to have been someone's pet at one time. We had hoped for a photo, but he is camera shy. If you are missing such a cat, please contact Michael Gray at 452-1910.