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Brush-clearing for fire safety faces a battle

BY MIKE LEE, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2010 AT 12:04 A.M.

Conservationists are on the verge of forcing county officials to conduct in-depth environmental reviews of plans to remove dead and dying trees from the backcountry that could fuel wildfires.

They've pinned their hopes on a case heard yesterday in San Diego Superior Court that likely will affect a long list of similar projects planned locally and in other fire-prone parts of California.

Judge Ronald Prager issued a tentative ruling in support of the California Chaparral Institute in Escondido. The nonprofit group sued county officials in hopes of slowing the planned work and altering the \$7 million, multiyear project, which includes clearing thousands of trees that are within 500 feet of homes and evacuation routes in the Julian area.



CHARLIE NEUMAN / UNION-TRIBUNE

The California Chaparral Institute's Richard Halsey stood amid native chaparral at a county preserve Wednesday. It's the kind of vegetation that could be cleared away.

Prager is expected to issue his final decision next week. His comments from the bench yesterday suggested he's not inclined to change his mind.

"There is not an imminent danger of any particular fire," he said. "This is the type of thing that ought to have an environmental review."

At issue is whether San Diego County officials correctly used an emergency exemption for the project, which they billed as a way to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires such as those that blackened a total of more than 760,000 acres in 2003 and 2007.

The county's stance reflects the idea that blazes can spread out of control with little warning. Based on that sense of urgency, they said government officials didn't have time for the standard ecological assessment required by the California Environmental Quality Act. That process includes looking at various animals and habitat along with taking public comments.

Environmental reviews can last two years and the traditional start of fire season is just six months away, said Carra Rhamy, a senior deputy county counsel.

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"Time is of the essence in implementing this project before the onset of additional fires," Rhamy said. "The longer it takes to remove trees that can be fuel, the more risk there is to the citizens."

If her arguments sway Prager, the cutting of trees could start in May.

If not, Rhamy said any decision to appeal is up to county supervisors.

The chaparral institute sued the county in June, challenging what it called a "misguided campaign against nature." The wildlands conservation group, formed in 2004, said wildfire conditions have been building for decades and that county executives have had plenty of time to do a full-blown environmental study.

"We want to prevent the loss of life and property from fires, but there is a good way to do that and a bad way," said institute Director Richard Halsey.

"We are going to follow through in making sure that taxpayer dollars are not wasted and habitat is not unnecessarily compromised."

Halsey said the county's vegetation management plan will needlessly harm terrain that makes San Diego County one of the most biologically diverse spots in the nation. Specifically, he opposes the proposed 500-foot buffer zone for roads and homes, saying it should be less than half that distance.

"We don't have 500-foot trees that are going to fall on our roads," Halsey said. "It's useless work."

The suit is funded by the institute's 500 members and the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society. Their lawyer, Rory Wicks at the Coast Law Group in Encinitas, told Prager he was concerned about county documents that show it has applied for more than \$480 million in grants for vegetation management across roughly 300 square miles.

By filing the legal challenge against the \$7 million project, Wicks hopes to compel the county to complete environmental reviews for the entire vegetation plan.

Halsey said the issue needs to be clarified in court because other agencies also are skirting complete ecological assessments in the name of fire prevention.

"It is one of the key environmental questions in the state, if not the country," Halsey said.

At the native plant society in Ojai, chapter President David Magney said he's fighting officials in Ventura County over fire-related projects that have allegedly sidestepped full environmental analysis.

If Prager's ruling stands, Magney said, "it will be a strong argument that we can use in Ventura County to say, 'You can't play this game anymore.'"

Mike Lee: (619) 293-2034; mike.lee@uniontrib.com

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Richard W. Halsey 0 minutes ago

For the record here, we wanted to explain why we filed the lawsuit in the first place.

We are strongly in favor of helping citizens create 100 feet of defensible space around their homes as per state law and developing strategic fuel breaks directly around communities. Such practices have proven to be incredibly effective if combined with fire-safe community designs (no wood roofs, ember resistant attic vents, etc.). That is NOT what the county is planning to do with the \$7 million in federal funds they received. The county wants to use tax-payer money to clear what they decide are dead or diseased trees 500 feet (nearly two football field lengths) away from roads and homes. If you consider the number of roads and structures on Palomar Mt. (one of the areas where we think they might use the funds), a significant portion of the mountain will be impacted.

Not only is this unnecessary and a waste of money, but may in fact increase fire risk by spreading flammable, invasive weeds and by giving people a false sense of security (the dead trees are gone, now I am safe). Dead trees are NOT the problem, but are great as political distractions because they provide the Board of Supervisors an easy way to say they have done something for fire safety (instead of say, adequately funding a county fire department - SD County has the most poorly funded fire protection service in the entire state). This kind of fuel reduction money needs to be used where it will do the most good, around people's homes and neighborhoods, not far away in the backcountry to cut trees that pose little fire risk.

The county decided to use an "emergency exemption" to avoid community input and environmental oversight. It prevents people from finding out what they are doing and where. We have tried repeatedly to get the details, but the county has failed to provide them. I know a lot of people have a knee jerk reaction to "environmental laws," but they not only protect nature, but also the rights of citizens by making sure the government is not pulling a fast one. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) - the law we sued under and the law the county broke - has been critical in preventing or modifying countless projects that local communities have found not to be in their best interest. Two recent examples include preventing SDG&E from building the Sunrise Powerlink wherever it wanted and is helping citizens fight the Merriam Mountain development in the northern part of the county. And of course, CEQA is critical in protecting our beautiful and valuable natural resources. Nature is not an abstraction. It is something many of us value. It needs to be considered and protected whenever a project is proposed. Nature needs a voice and CEQA helps provide that voice.

CEQA forces agencies to have a coherent plan BEFORE spending our money and allows us to keep an eye on what they are doing. It forces agencies and developers to fix the mess they cause. The county has failed to produce a plan. They need to have one, and one that incorporates the most effective practices in reducing fire risk. That is why we sued. The court agreed with us in its preliminary ruling because the county broke the law by using an "exemption" that is only to be used for short-term emergencies like a collapsing ocean bluff (the need for an immediate support) or a raging fire (cutting fuel breaks, etc.). The county's clearing project addresses a long-term issue and will take an estimated 3-4 years to complete. It is part of a larger project that proposes to clear an area over 300 square miles. To consider such a thing without environmental review is beyond insanity.

The county is trying to frighten the community by basically saying there is a fire raging 24 hours a day and we are all going to die unless we suspend our laws and allow the government to tell us what we need. This is the same kind of thing that governments have done for centuries. Exploiting fear works, and they know it. What all of us must do when panic is high is to be extra vigilant and make sure our laws are followed. When we have failed to do so in the past, our country has experienced some of our darkest moments.

Regarding the chaparral and why we are so concerned about this important ecosystem. When looking at the entire state, it is clear we have already lost a significant amount of native shrubland to increased fire frequency, development, and over-grazing over the past 150 years. There are currently about 8 million acres of chaparral left in the state (conservatively there were probably more than 12 million acres prior to European settlement). We are likely to lose about half of what is remaining under various climate change estimates. It doesn't matter if you think climate change is caused by humans or not, the climate is changing and that change does not bode well for native shrublands and the wildlife that still lives there.

Add increasing fire frequencies and the fragmentation of habitat caused by development, chaparral is indeed quite threatened. Without someone or some group ringing the alarm and helping to protect what is left, it is quite likely that what is covered in chaparral today will look like what can be seen along Interstate 15 and 215 between Lake Elsinore and Riverside... mile after mile of invasive, weedy grasses.

That's one of the reasons we started the California Chaparral Institute and one of the reasons we sued the county.

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 waynetyson 4 hours ago

"Aye, dinna forget, laddie [lassie], 'tis friction's brisk, rough rub, 'at pr'vides the VITAL SPARK!" --adapted from Alexander Reid Martin

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 waynetyson 23 hours ago

In reply to JimWells, etc.:

I'm so tech-averse, I can't figure out for sure what "post 9 below" is, but I presume it was the one with 3 points, to wit,

"OK, going taking a chance on two limbs.

"1) I smile to think of myself as one of those dying but with plenty of life left in me specialists. It takes real sensitivity to take maximum advantage of cryptogamic soils while not damaging them."

I hope your death is not near. I stumbled into moss mats about 1969 or '70. There was a big contiguous patch over 80 feet across where the parking lot and lawn is now just West of the Morley Field Tennis courts. I tried to explain the rarity to the City park engineers and got lots of laughs. Since then I have used various methods to restore them, and am close to something practical in the way of mass-production of propagules and how to get them to grow back. The response is IMMEDIATE, with the first rains. You're right; they don't take much traffic, so they need to be in low-traffic areas. Goats, for example, destroy them.

"2) Think about how cryptogamic soils would be REQUISITE in order to establish a relatively stable and succession-capable vegetation cover on sand dunes that would eventually support evergreens, and think about how easily and quickly destroyed such thin layers on sand would be to just even human foot traffic, let alone ANY on-the-ground activities of man-over-nature attitudes."

It's very difficult to establish moss-mats on an eroding surface, but once that is done, there is no better surface to prevent weed growth and promote quick infiltration of rain and prevent erosion. I have observed fairly steep slopes covered with moss mats with clear runoff water flowing rapidly over them during intense storms.

"Now I must say:

"3) I wholeheartedly agree that the fighting-word posters and environmentalists-are-all-starry-eyed-elitists deliveries are borne primarily of fear and feelings of helplessness, that when our politicians and bureaucrats can get us fighting one another that's when they get to most easily step in and do whatever the heck they want to from a role of adult supervision, and that, as you wrote, individuals such as starman, outdoorguy, etc, have ideas that are just as good a place to start community discussions leading to working together with the same set of facts to collaboratively brainstorm solution greater than anyone or cliché could ever have come up with.. The winner-take-all and horse-trading (erroneously called "compromise") models for public policy formation are archaic and dysfunctional."

The distinction between "balance" and reconciliation (NO relation to Senate procedure) IS CRUCIAL! Having the polar-opposite extremists from "both sides" may make titillating TeeVee, but it doesn't move the ball down the field. But so-called "environmentalists" have got to face the fact that there ARE a lot of elitist who happen to be "environmentalists." I believe "get real" is the current expression--unless I've once again dropped below the cool-line.

But back to fire hazard reduction. If we take the finger-wagging lecturing out of the equation and simply insist upon what we all can agree with (optimal allocation of scarce resources, competence, honesty, etc.) the goals of the environmentalists will be more than achieved and fire hazard reduction will be a measurable quantity. That will NEVER HAPPEN, however, as long as our leaders and power-brokers continue to silence any voice of reason that questions their rigid opinions. It's all about CONTROL, and obsessive, narcissistic control at that. On that point, it takes unrelenting assertiveness, but once you're at the table, it's time for intellectual discipline, a framework that goes through the issues point-by-point. Strength, not screaming in panic. Or curling up like a pillbug.

For example, such a leadership-group (narcissism-free) could address one question at a time, resolve it, and move on--sans the digression-tactics that characterize so-called "free-for-alls" euphemistically referred to as

"public meetings." Above all, strength means sticking to the subject. That's the only way the ball will get moved down the field to the goal we all have in common. Narcissism is the only obstacle I see, the source of the kind of lack of discipline (including from the "chair") that seems to characterize all of the proceedings. We don't need no stinkin' "chairs;" we can do this with a simple "sense of the group" procedure. But we have to DO it, not just pixel about it.

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JimWells 15 hours ago in reply to waynetyson

I've done it. In grand fashion once, and once in a while since then rather successfully. And it is BEST done without having to focus on only one "decision" at a time. Unfortunately for you, I no longer live in So Cal, because it is something that can only really be accomplished well by community members in concert. There is a great story about a rver community of 27 cliques that for at least three decades operated like an open-alliance Risk game -- with each issue came a different mix of alliances between the cliques calling the others idiots and undesirable and accusing them of pursuing selfish interests instead of communitiy interests. What would logic say about that? That they were all pots calling kettles black? In other words, that none of them were true community members?

Well, that changed one weekend, and the results were so amazing even I, who was largely responsible for the opportunity, to this day have to blink in amazement when I tell the story. The community began to speak in one voice, and it was accomplished with individuals in a room for two full days that ranged from right-wing law-and-order religious fundamentalist who considered nudity a sin (period! I think they made love with their PJs on) to left-wing anarchists who considered it something to flaunt, especially in the face of those who called for imprisonment of nudists. You should have heard the righties, one by one, declare that they could let-live as long as they felt safe in their community, and the lefties, one by one, say they would do everything they could to keep the righties safe and would respect their desire for themselves nor their children see nudity. And a reciprocal dyanmic occured.

I'll spare everyone else the details here. Hope you got your curiosity enough to contact me directly, because I wish to discuss the cryptogamic soil subject with you regarding a project it would be irresponsible to discuss in public. homegrown53@hotmail.com

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JimWells 1 day ago

waynetyson~ see my post 9 below

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rich_fairbanks 1 day ago

Thanks Rick for trying to move the County toward science-based fire management. The Counties get-a-bigger-bulldozer approach really doesnt work.

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Richard W. Halsey 20 hours ago in reply to rich_fairbanks

Thanks Rich. That's what we have been hoping for.

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waynetyson 1 day ago

myearth and 1 more liked this.

For starman and others who lost homes to fires:

You are in a special class. Friends of mine have lost theirs to fires ignited by wildfires in one way or another. One had a steel-clad house surrounded by grass cut to two inches. Another had the cutest wood-shingled bungalow in a canyon full of oak trees. The loss of homes and possessions and lives, not to mention the pain

and anguish is something that shouldn't happen. And the victims shouldn't be blamed. Our leaders are supposed to be the best our community has; unfortunately, we all know they get elected by The Big Money and by bazz-fazzing us. They've got a lot on their shoulders and they need our help more than our invective. But a bunch of us tried to help; we were all dissed in the extreme by the Bored of Supervisors. Nothing is gained by muzzling people we don't agree with; we should join together and try to find the truth. I know that I didn't know what I didn't know in the past, but by being open to SPECIFIC criticism from others, I will find out more and more about what I don't know about what I don't know.

I wish I could shake your hand (I presume that the gender of "starman" is male) or hug you or whatever suits you (if you're female), and sit down for a cup of coffee or a beer and just listen to your story. Your ideas are just as good a place to start as anyone's.

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starbrite 1 day ago in reply to waynetyson



JimWells liked this.

Waynetyson, you extend the olive branch when, while most of the rest of us have politely responded to starman1's (and others') comments, we have failed to recognize the pain from which they speak. Thank you for being upstanding and compassionate enough to reach out.

Let it be clear that those of us responding to such individuals as starman1 are not singling them out, nor discrediting their perspective, on the basis of their personal experiences in having lost homes to fire. These are experiences none of us should have to go through; and truly, unless one has personally gone through it, none of us can understand the absolute pain and grief that comes with it. Our responses are to the comments that are primarily comprised of name-calling, ridicule, belittlement, and unwarranted discredit - and these responses SHOULD be (and to my observation largely HAVE been) civil, with the intention of informing, not belittling. Ignorance does not equate to stupidity. Those who believe that the County's current vegetation-clearing plan will be effective are ignorant of the nature of fire behavior, the effectiveness of making one's home and property fire-safe, and the limitations of fire crews in protecting homes and other structures in the path of an advancing flamefront. Ignorance simply means a lack of knowledge and understanding. That's all. MOST citizens are ignorant of these things, which not only disempowers them to taking vital defensive measures to protect their homes and property, but furthers the current myths and misinformation so widespread among the general public. Again, this doesn't make any of them stupid. But it does continue to feed the problem. What we need is better (and mandated) community education on what typically happens during a fire, how homes are lost, and what homeowners can do to protect themselves - along with explaining the limitations of what local and state government and emergency crews are capable of accomplishing with regards to this matter. By not properly educating the public, the government sustains large-scale ignorance, which results in angry victims demanding visible action, which leads to measures that LOOK like something, but aren't actually solving anything, which leads to continued losses each time a fire burns through. It's a vicious cycle.

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waynetyson 1 day ago



JimWells and 1 more liked this.

While I appreciate all the hilarious banter, most of what I might have said that is irrelevant or irreverent to the subject has been said; I sincerely thank all the wags for that. Also, there have been some excellent posts on the facts, so I will try not to be too redundant nor deal in no double-negatives, much less be negative.

Before the invasion of this land by aliens, fires were pretty infrequent and didn't amount to much. That wasn't, as one currently popular myth has it, because humans burned brush and didn't put them out, it was because the alien weedy grasses and forbs that increase ignitions and set fire to it were not here.

What was here (in places weeds now occupy) has been largely destroyed by soil disturbance. It has a funny name, "cryptobiotic" or "cryptogamic" soil crust (let's call it "soil moss-mat" even though moss is only part of a complex bunch of organisms that make up the crust). This stuff covered most of the ground just about everywhere in the chaparral region, all the way down to the coast. The moss mat is only about a quarter of an inch thick at most, so it doesn't burn. It is so tight that weeds can't get a root-hold. Unlike the weedy grass stuff, which ignites at the drop of a spark, you can't get this stuff to burn no matter how many matches you toss onto it.

Any Boy- or Girl-Scout knows how hard it is to start a fire; you have to have very fine tinder to start with, then build up with fine kindling, then coarser kindling, then twigs and branches, then logs. So, that one change, from a moss-mat cover to alien grasses (foxtails, etc.) and other weeds (mustard, etc.), vastly increased the ignition probability of the native vegetation types it occupied. It also drastically changed fire behavior. A good Scout also knows that there is an optimal arrangement of the pieces of fuel in relationship to each other and oxygen. Briefly, that means that if the fuel is all packed so closely that enough oxygen can't get to the fuel, like, say, a phone book, it won't burn very well—at least not until it is exposed long enough to enough heat. But if you wad up each page of a phone book, it will burn like fury. Wind is a way of replacing the oxygen that the

combustion uses up while giving up carbon dioxide—which itself makes a pretty good fire extinguisher. But even with wind, if the pieces of fuel (phone book pages or grass-blades or branches or bushes or trees or houses) are separated far enough apart, the fire will be restricted to the pieces of fuel that are hot enough to burn. The classic fire triangle of fuel, oxygen, and temperature is valid, but it tells you nothing about the crucial importance of exposure time at a given temperature, fuel proximity to ignition source (a piece of burning or hot fuel), or the fact that any fire will consume all of the oxygen available to it if there is no means for bringing in replacement oxygen. In other words, the triangle isn't static; fire is a dynamic process. It's simple enough—it has some pretty fixed requirements—but it is a changing phenomenon.

If you don't want to die, don't try to breathe smoke; most deaths and serious injuries are caused by smoke, not flames. More people die evacuating than die in their homes. This is another counter-intuitive fact that is strongly resisted, and that is understandable—it's as natural to run from a fire as it is from a bear, but that doesn't make it a good idea in all cases, or even most cases.

If you don't want your house to burn, make sure that any fire will not make anything combustible hot enough long enough to ignite the fuels close to it. Fire temperatures can be very hot at the flame front of a wildland fire, but the combustible fuels burn more quickly the hotter it is. Exposure time to heat is lower in a hotter fire. Counterintuitive? You bet! So temperatures fall off pretty quickly with distance; some research has shown that even vulnerable (wood) structures do not ignite in even the hottest wildland fires beyond about 30 feet. That's been fairly common knowledge for a few decades. So 100 feet of "defensible space" is probably a reasonably safe bet.

But no matter how big the defensible space is around your house is, all it takes to get the chain reaction going is one little glowing chip of wood to light on something hot enough to ignite that is next to something like it (and so on) to light it off. And, "defensible" space is not good enough if there's no one there to defend.

Adequate fire suppression forces and equipment need to be there at the right moment to be heroic. Even a small grass fire in low grass in good burn-prescription conditions of low or zero wind can produce some pretty strong whirlwinds—strong enough to lift little pieces of chipped brush high into the air where it can travel downwind and land in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There's a lot more here, but I'm tired, even this might not fit, and I sense I'm wasting my breath anyway.

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starbrite 1 day ago in reply to waynetyson

I second JimWells. Very well said. Another who clearly is informed on the issue.

I'm beginning to sense we have a handful of wildland firefighters in our midst...or at least individuals who have been trained as such.

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JimWells 1 day ago in reply to waynetyson

NICE

good stuff

it takes a lot of explaining to reverse/erase prevailing, incorrect myths about fire

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JimWells 1 day ago in reply to JimWells

Specifically, the stuff about cryptogamic soils is very key, very sophisticated, and unfortunately very obscure in every discussion of ecosystem issues outside of soil scientific circles. In the wild mushroom world, for instance, it plays a HUGE role, but is never taken into account in land management decisions regarding them.

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waynetyson 1 day ago in reply to JimWells



Richard W. Halsey liked this.

Yeah, the moss mat is ignored by most biologists, even botanists (some even ignore grasses), and (gulp!) not a few ecologists. Some lovers know about it, but then that's a dying specialty. The stuff is that hard to find, but I have restored it in some places, and you can't believe the diversity/richness. Unfortunately, one of the best places is under lock and key. But

enough of that; the point is that IF it was restored, the alien weed problems (and thus much of the fire problem), would be much reduced—at far less cost. Just think—no more foxtails in your socks!

And, it would be far cheaper and longer-lasting (making it HUGELY cheaper), to provide some jobs and improved health by spending those millions on some lopping shears (jobs too) and plumbing (more jobs), starting with the most hazardous areas up against existing homes, and then, money and resources permitting, work at some of the forest-tree/chaparral interfaces/ecotones to reduce “flame-laddering” into the forest/woodland trees.

But, believe it or not, CHEAPER is pure poison in politics. The idea is to MILK the taxpayer, not save them money or pay firefighter salaries. Now don't get me started on saving the lives of firefighters too—I'm politically incorrect enough as it is.

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JimWells 1 day ago in reply to waynetyson

OK, going taking a chance on two limbs.

1) I smile to think of myself as one of those dying but with plenty of life left in me specialists. It takes real sensitivity to take maximum advantage of cryptogamic soils while not damaging them.

2) Think about how cryptogamic soils would be REQUISITE in order to establish a relatively stable and succession-capable vegetation cover on sand dunes that would eventually support evergreens, and think about how easily and quickly destroyed such thin layers on sand would be to just even human foot traffic, let alone ANY on-the-ground activities of man-over-nature attitudes

Now I must say:

3) I wholeheartedly agree that the fighting-word posters and environmentalists-are-all-starry-eyed-ellitists deliveries are borne primarily of fear and feelings of helplessness, that when our politicians and bureaucrats can get us fighting one another that's when they get to most easily step in and do whatever the heck they want to from a role of adult supervision, and that, as you wrote, individuals such as starman, outdoorguy, etc, have ideas that are just as good a place to start community discussions leading to working together with the same set of facts to collaboratively brainstorm solution greater than anyone or cliché could ever have come up with.. The winner-take-all and horse-trading (erroneously called "compromise") models for public policy formation are archaic and dysfunctional.

I thank you for the articulation that victims of home loss from wildfire should not be "blamed." I hope my comments to starman1 did not come off as blaming starman1 for the loss of starman1's home to wildfire. However, I do believe that people do, and thus that starman1 probably did, fail to consider the risks of loss to wildfire before they decided to purchase a home, and that it is the home purchasers' responsibility to do so, not the government's. However, our governments ought to be trying to properly educate us about such things, not pulling the wool over our eyes to make their public-dole jobs even more secure by pandering to the monied interests in their constituencies.(which, as you and others have pointed to, is really a problem. And with the recent treasonous 5 Supremes decision to allow unrestricted corporate campaign financing as a "citizen's right of free speech", that problem is only going to get astronomically worse.) MORE THAN EVER, it is going to be important for common citizens to work truly collaboratively in public input in order to have enough voice to be heard over volume of the noise that money can make.

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starbrite 1 day ago in reply to JimWells

I had never even heard of cryptogramic soils, much less understood their ecological role. Something new for me to learn about...

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waynetyson 1 day ago in reply to starbrite

Everybody doesn't need to know all the specifics about everything, only the PRINCIPLES. The important thing is that we actually COMMUNICATE, especially with, not to, those who are coming from a place of hurt and fear. When I was fortunate enough to live next to the chaparral with a canyon below me, it took me less than a day with a pair of lopping shears and one helper to maintain my "defensible" space. Actually, "defensible" is the wrong term; it needs to be a place where the fire is forced to the ground out at 100 feet, then burns itself out long before it gets near the structure.

All that is needed is that the fire be low, below the branches of the big, green-in-summer shrubs that the lopping shears convert to little trees with canopies that keep on protecting the soil surface from erosion and leave the roots to prevent landslides (by anchoring, providing a tensile-strength matrix, facilitating drainage, and by removing excess water in some situations, e.g. Soledad). This is not "thinning" by the way, except at the 100-foot "line" (which can and should vary with the topography and gradient, just wide enough to keep the fire from igniting the shrub/tree tops within the treated area. With the fire on the ground, these little trees survive instead of being killed to the ground in a fire. This, plus water on the house and immediate environs, is almost all that is need for zero loss of life and zero loss of homes. It ain't rocket-science.

It's not that there is ZERO danger from wildland fires; it's just that if we optimally allocate scarce resources instead of shoot from the hip, we can increase, not decrease, fire safety. There need be NO compromise of safety, and we can IMPROVE most habitats in the process.

I (with the help of the Western Region Fire Lab, and representatives of every willing responsible agency in the county, known at the time as a "task force") wrote "the book" on "Fire Hazard Reduction and Open Space Management" after the 1970 Kitchen Creek fire, but it was suppressed by the city manager's office. Made some mistakes, like a 500-foot "fuel density gradient," but for the most part we got it right. I was "disinvited" to the SD County meetings. [[2010 Feb 28, 8:25 PM]]

[Flag](#)

Like

Reply



starbrite 1 day ago in reply to waynetyson

Ah, wait, cryptobiotic. I HAVE heard that word before. The troughs between the White Sands in Alamogordo, New Mexico, are encrusted by a cryptobiotic layer. (It was in the pamphlet I picked up the last time I was out there.) I had no idea it existed out here, or at least had existed.

Good Lord, what did this place look like before human beings showed up? Is what we have now really so different from what used to be, say, 100+ years ago?

[Flag](#)

Like

Reply



starbrite 1 day ago in reply to waynetyson

You're right, not everyone needs to know "everything" about everything; but I have actually specifically set my sights on pursuing an education in biology/ecology, so this cryptogamic soil sounds like something I should learn about for my own edification.

[Flag](#)

Like

Reply



Jackie 2 days ago

I agree with Jean and myearth. No sense in acting first and thinking later. It would be terrible if we lost unique wilderness due to shortsighted and ill-informed actions. Let's be safe and also good stewards of the land. I live on a ridge top and work hard to make my place defensible and I also nurture - and enjoy - the indigenous ecology, which is why I live there in the first place. I'm glad these decisions are going to be made wisely. Good job, Chaparral Institute and CNPS, I applaud all the hard work this action takes.

Like

Reply

Flag



 Jean Kaiwi 2 days ago

Keeping native vegetation surrounding our homes and communities serves us in the long run. We are part of "nature" and we should be trying to live compatibly with the vegetation that has adapted to support the wildlife in our region. Demoning chaparral or other native plant communities will not serve us in the long run.

Flag

Like Reply

 myearth 2 days ago

 Richard W. Halsey liked this.

Preparing for fire begins at home. People need to take personal responsibility beginning inside their home, then on the exterior and then on their landscaping. Instead, too many want someone else or the government to do things in the back country that really won't help or won't help much. A few examples of things you can do--inside--get those flammable window coverings away from your windows, make sure windows are airtight. We had to replace some that weren't. Your house--put up vent screens, enclose open decks, search for places embers can collect. Outside--ditch the fan palms. You should have seen them flying through the air here--large burning arrows moving at high speeds. Make sure you follow the defensible space guidelines. Remember the most important point here is to give firefighters space to work. Lots of information is available to help people do what they need to do personally. Please take action to prevent yours and your neighbors homes from burning. It's not a guarantee, but it will help all of us. And stop blaming others if you haven't done the things you can. Sometimes, it is too expensive to do everything that would be good to do, but do all you can!

Flag

You liked this. Reply

 outdooroguy 2 days ago

Richard Halsey wrote, "actually I have been trained as a wildland firefighter,.". Come on Halsey, tell us all about your life as a "wildland firefighter". Was it 3 or 4 weeks before you quit? As a Boy Scout I was trained in CPR but that doesn't make me a paramedic.

Flag

Like Reply

 Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to outdooroguy

Outdooroguy, let's stay focused on the issue, not personalities.

Flag

Reply

 surfer74 20 hours ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Here, here!!!

Flag

Like Reply

 outdooroguy 2 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Halsey, you have made your tenure as a wildland firefighter a key component in giving credibility to your arguments. So once again, just how long were you a wildland firefighter?

Flag

Like Reply

 outdooroguy 2 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Halsey, you have made your tenure as a wildland firefighter a key component in giving credibility to your arguments. So once again, just how long were you a wildland firefighter?



Flag

Like Reply



starbrite 1 day ago in reply to outdoorguy

outdoorguy,

While it seems you are more interested in personally attacking than in participating in any sort of rational and civil discussion on the matter, please note that Halsey is correct. HE never stated that he is or was a wildland firefighter, nor did he make any claims to his training and background in such any part of his argument for credibility. Myself and a few others made that statement - and to his credit, he has made the proper distinction between being a wildland firefighter and being trained as a wildland firefighter. He has not made a career out of it, although I am particularly impressed with the fact that he chose to educate himself in the field to further his knowledge and understanding of how fire affects the local ecosystems and the human communities that chose to dwell in them. It was a misinterpretation on my part and on the part of a few others that led the errant misrepresentation of Halsey being a wildland firefighter. If you are still interested in hurtling slander and capricious scathings at anyone, please direct them at me (I will not open the others up to this invitation without their permission), since I am one who was errant on that matter.

I do still stand by my assertion that Halsey has, perhaps, one of the most balanced perspectives on this matter, given his extensive background in biology and ecology, his life experience as a San Diego resident and homeowner who nearly lost his home to wildfire, and the education, training and experience he has received in wildland firefighting as a seasonal.

Flag

Like Reply



JimWells 1 day ago in reply to starbrite

agreed

thanks for being such a stand-up person, starbrite!

Hopefully outdoorguy will read your post and get infected by the integrity it displays

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to outdoorguy

starbrite liked this.

Outdoorguy, to help you put into perspective my statement, let's first of all clarify that I never said I was a wildland firefighter. What I said was that I have been trained as a wildland firefighter. There is a big distinction. As to my training, I earned my federal red card (basically a federal license that says you are a qualified firefighter) in 2006 and renewed my training in 2008 with the US Forest Service. Both training sessions involved intense physical training as well as in-class learning. As a qualified seasonal firefighter I participated in a fire mop-up in the Cleveland National Forest, a weeklong prescribed burn with CalFire (where I unfortunately experienced a near burn over) and monitored several wildfires as they were being actively suppressed. My experience allowed me to help organize my neighborhood to defend homes during the 2007 fires. I have also spent hundreds of hours with firefighting colleagues learning from their experience, both during and after wildfire events. Considering I did all of this after I was 50 years old, when firefighters qualify for retirement, should help you better appreciate my commitment to understand as much as I can about fire. I hope this helps.

Flag

Edit Reply



JimWells 2 days ago in reply to outdoorguy

starbrite and 1 more liked this.

I look forward to Halsey's reply to this question, although not for the same reasons as outdoorguy perhaps -- because I do not have the same impression that outdoorguy seems to have that Halsey has made his wildland firefighting experience a key component of his credibility on these issues. Maybe I missed something, but I thought Halsey wrote of it in response to being baited by a poster for being in an ignorant fantasyland for lack of

backcountry fire experience.

While I do not think that wildland firefighting experience is necessary in order to understand the complex and subtle subject of fire dynamics/ecology, it can certainly add valuable extra insight capabilities. But it can also obscure things in clouds of smoke, depending on whether one was just in it for the thrill, sex, drugs, money, and hazardous duty extra retirement pay, or whether one was actually paying attention to actions vs. effective results.

I would like to point out that there are many wildland firefighters who wholeheartedly agree with Halsey, and are grateful for his effort to educate. Many of these are members of Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology

So now I ask even more pointedly -- what experiences does outdoorguy have that leads outdoorguy to believe that Halsey's coastal chaparral fire facts are incorrect, and which facts would those be?

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to JimWells

Jim, I tried to answer Outdoorguy's demand as best I could. See above. It will be interesting to see his response, if any.

Flag

Edit Reply



JimWells 2 days ago in reply to outdoorguy

outdoorguy~

and just what is your point?

and more to the point, what is YOUR background that gives YOU standing to question Halsey's facts and/or how he has put them together?

Flag

Like Reply



jnojr 2 days ago

If people do not clear away dead fuel, then nature eventually will.

People will do a much better job of leaving homes and lives intact behind them. Nature... not so much.

Flag

Like Reply



awchap 2 days ago in reply to jnojr

I cannot agree with this. Most of the fires we've seen in the past ten or fifteen were created by man.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to jnojr

Jnojr, good point. That is exactly what we would like to see happen - providing money to remove flammable materials directly around homes and communities. This is why we filed the lawsuit against the county. They are spending scarce tax-payer dollars in areas that do not represent the greatest fire risk to people.

Flag

Edit Reply



awchap 2 days ago

It is refreshing to see the County being told to put aside its chaparral plans. We need to use other means to

live in this environment without destroying it first.

Andrew

Flag

Like Reply

 awchap 2 days ago

It is refreshing to see the County being told to put their destructive policy aside. We need to employ better ways to live in this environment without destroying it first.

Flag

Like Reply

 GeoffreySmith 2 days ago

 starbrite liked this.

If homeowners in the wildland-urban fire interface were to spend more time improving the fire safety of their own structures (remove wooden decks, screen vents, double-pane glass, box eaves, etc.), the issue would become moot.

Flag

Like Reply

 surfer74 2 days ago

 starbrite and 1 more liked this.

Thank you, Mike Lee, for covering this, and to those who have commented on the article. It is reasonable to apply this exemption from CEQA to the removal of vegetation within 100 feet of structures (defensible space) and a reasonable distance (up to 200 feet) within evacuation corridors, as this is a short-term one-time project that immediately and directly reduces risks of loss of life and property. It is my understanding that this exemption was applied to the Fire Safety and Fuels Reduction program in 2005-2007, for removal of dead, dying, and diseased trees within 100 feet of habitable structures and 200 feet of evacuation corridors. With this action, the county is proposing to remove dead trees within 500 feet of structures and evacuation routes. IF supported by a silviculture or forest management plan (with environmental documentation), the removal of such dead trees could contribute to a healthier forest.

Actually, of greater concern is the increasingly common "clearance" of shrubland vegetation within 300 or 400 or 500 feet of structures. That extension of defensible space to 500 feet is totally unsupported by research, damage assessments following wildfires, expert opinion, or current state law. Defensible space of 100 feet is sufficient to reduce structure ignition from radiation and convection, NOT from conduction (embers). (If a 4-ft tall buckwheat or black sage scrub is growing 80 feet away from the house and ignites during a wildfire, the flames will be 12-15 ft and will not be hot enough to ignite the structure 80 ft away.)

Reducing structure ignitions from EMBERS is achieved at the STRUCTURE and within the 100 feet landscaped yard and defensible space, not by extending "clearing" of vegetation beyond 100 feet. Furthermore, removal of vegetation up to 500 feet from structures has a high likelihood that highly flammable annual weeds will grow, with a high annual cost of cutting these weeds down. Such excessive removal means the fire risk will be increased rather than decreased.

Reducing (or clearing) vegetation 500 feet around a single home (assuming a circle) would yield about 780,000 square feet or almost 18 acres of altered vegetation and loss of habitat, whereas reducing vegetation 100 feet around a rural home is about 31,000 square feet or about 0.75 acres. The costs would be 30 times more, and there would be 30 times as much native habitat lost. For the same Federal fuel reduction dollars, assuming that the cost per acre is approximately the same, there would be far greater benefit from establishing defensible space within 100 feet of 100 structures, instead of 500 feet around five structures. Such extensive vegetation removal also increases soil erosion and dramatically reduces native habitats, local wildlife, and in some areas, threatened and endangered species. So the costs are increased and nature is lost, without reducing any risks of structural ignition by embers. Anne Fege, PhD.

- posted courtesy of surfer74

Flag

You liked this. Reply

 yogaphan 2 days ago

What the County plans to do is much more than just removing dead and dying trees. They want to create a dead zone which will then be filled with invasive weeds and grasses. The County plan is seriously flawed and needs review. Don't jump to conclusions based on the misleading wording in this story.

Flag

Like Reply



shortxcircuit 2 days ago in reply to yogaphan

They are sacrificing peoples safety and homes to save some trees, I hope their actions are remembered next fire season.

Flag

Like Reply



yogaphan 2 days ago in reply to shortxcircuit

If the county's plan would work I would sacrifice the trees too, but it won't work! It is like using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. Nothing will be left but invasive weeds after this type of clearing. And the invasive weeds will bring the fires to the home FASTER than the chaparral. This has been studied over and over by qualified scientists (as well as fire personnel). The county's approach DOES NOT WORK.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to shortxcircuit

Shortxcircuit, we are actually hoping to convince the county to use the money to remove vegetation directly around homes, not out in the backcountry where it will have minimum impact on reducing fire risk to people.

Flag

Edit Reply



besafenotsorry 2 days ago



Richard W. Halsey liked this.

State law require property owners beside wildlands to remove dead fuel and to thin plants out to 100' from homes, more if fire experts say more - on steep slopes primarily. Evacuation roads and facilities like schools and hospitals may go farther (if they can afford it, one might add). Fire experts have conducted studies that show this way to reduce fuel out to 100' is only one of the three parts needed to reduce wildfir risk to homes, the other two being to fire-proof yards and to retrofit homes so embers can't penetrate them. No expert and no law said there is any value going to 500'. The money that would be needed to do this is needed to make structures and yards resistant to embers. People need to be strongly told these are the other two priorities to save homes and lives. Instead, somebody at the county dreamed up that 500' program. It looks like it has fooled some of the people who have written comments into thinking county regulations would protect them,. Sadly, it is just wasting time and money that could be used to really make people safer - and it is needlessly wrecking lots of land in the process, leaving it in a condition that will result in a longer fire season, ore easily ignited and faster-burning vegetation, and greater erosion risks.

Flag

You liked this. Reply



typenter 2 days ago



carries liked this.

I'm surprised that the county got away for so long with claiming "emergency exemption" from the California Environmental Quality Act under the argument that "blazes can spread out of control with little warning, so we're ALWAYS in a state of emergency." That's like an anti-Catch 22, where there's nothing anyone can do to stop them from proceeding unhindered. As Judge Prager said, such an argument is clearly fallacious.

Flag

Like Reply



myearth 3 days ago

 carries liked this.

What I see in this forum so frequently is that when people want a law enforced, they are all for the government doing that. When they are opposed to a law, they think people who want it enforced are extremists, Nazis, environnazis, whatever. Do we really want a government that gets to pick and choose when it obeys the law? Apparently, some do, but I think that is dangerous. If you disagree with a law, campaign to get it repealed. Disagree with the law if you want to, but stop all of this name calling because someone (GASP!) dared to force the county to obey the law. If the county action is truly necessary, they have had 6 years after the first fires to make a plan and complete an environmental review. Why is it now an emergency? It appears that they thought all along that they could break the law and do whatever they wanted without being questioned about it.

Flag

Like Reply



Blisful 2 days ago in reply to myearth

Myearth- the words "Nazis" and "Racist" are used by most posters here as impact words. They're used incorrectly. Most only have a fuzzy idea of what they mean. Most people of sound mind don't believe in genetic superiority anymore, but still throw around racist in these blogs as an example.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to Blisful

Using the term Nazi in an argument automatically causes a person to lose that argument. Here is the somewhat humorous law that explains that process:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godwin's_law

Flag

Edit Reply



baccharis 3 days ago

 carries and 1 more liked this.

One thing lost in the discussion of tiddlywinks and Nazis is how radical the plan by the county is. For one, 500 feet is quite a distance for clearing, almost the length of two football fields. Not only is it way more clearing distance than prudent, it would be very expensive, more than needed and a waste of my taxpayer dollars. Even more radical is their intention to ignore the law. If I'm against anything it is out of control government, big government, government that ignores the will of the people. Since Ronald Reagan signed CEQA into law, the statute has improved the lives, and saved the lives, of thousands of Californians. If San Diego County can toss the law aside because they consider it inconvenient, then the law loses the power to protect the environment and people throughout California.

Flag

Like Reply



susitb 3 days ago

 Nicholas Halsey liked this.

I'm astounded at those who assume that wanting a thoughtful - and legally required - review of what the county proposes means you're an eco-Nazi. Do your homework and skip the knee-jerk reactions, please.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago

For a complete history of our lawsuit and efforts to improve fire safety in San Diego County, please visit our webpage on the subject here:

<http://www.californiachaparral.org/dsdcountysla...>

Flag

Edit Reply

 Normbc9 3 days ago

This is a simple issue. If you live in the wild lands and have an adequate defensible space the chances of your dwelling surviving a wild fire are pretty good. If you don't keep the space then be ready to give up the dwelling to fire. The massive BTU's put off by burning vegetation are astounding.

Flag

Like Reply

 minutiaequeen 3 days ago

 Richard W. Halsey liked this.

I am surprised at the tenor of this discourse. Name calling has never been an effective way to win an argument and rash generalizations about people or groups don't help us understand the issues involved.

We are fortunate to live in one of the most beautiful counties in the United States and the chapparall is a large part of that beauty. Before we allow our public officials to clear large sections we should insure that it is truly necessary. Remember the Joni Mitchell song? "Don't it always seem to go you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

Flag

You liked this. Reply

 myearth 3 days ago

 carries liked this.

The whole point of this action is to force the county to better protect people from fire by spending the money where it ought to be spent and is the most effective. Look at where most homes are lost during fires--at the wildland-urban interface. More money needs to be spent to protect these homes and to prevent fires from entering urban areas. I believe dead trees should be cleared when they are close to structures and roads. But to remove all vegetation, living and dead, to 500 feet away, allowing weeds and flashy fuels to grow increases the fire risk. And not a dime is being spent in areas like mine, which lost the most homes in the last fires. The county needs to protect us, not waste our money on things that sound good but are not effective.

Flag

Like Reply

 Joe Friday 3 days ago in reply to myearth

Exactly! And... more money needs to be spent on an actual county FD rather than useless brush clearing.

Basically, the county has adopted the position that it's cheaper to burn it all rather than pay for a FD to protect itself. They, of course, have not figured out that they cannot burn it all and there will always be fires.

Flag

Like Reply

 curtissmixon 3 days ago

these eco whatever. What I see is they are very anti anything. What, you want some fresh clean water, no! You might kill a fish. What, you want a clearing that fire can't jump over easily? No. Keep your houses and buildings there for fuel. Idiots!

Flag

Like Reply

 Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to curtissmixon

Curtissmixon, actually our request is quite simple. The county needs to follow the law and allow citizens to comment about how their tax dollars are spent.

Flag

Reply



curtissmixon 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

You should be that involved in federal spending.

[Flag](#)

[Like](#)

[Reply](#)



Rokky 3 days ago

I guess Richard Halsey doesn't live in the backcountry and probably has never watched a wall of flames moving at 35 miles an hour towards his community and his home. The removal of Dead and Dying trees should have started immediately after The Cedar Fire, The Witch Fire, and The Harris Fire. This fuel needs to be cleared to not only save the habitat, but more importantly save human lives. Get a handle on common sense and lets prevent more county disasters. Once those wildfires get out of control the strong east winds will drive them towards the coast and then Judge we all feel the heat.

[Flag](#)

[Like](#)

[Reply](#)



starbrite 3 days ago in reply to Rokky

Rokky,

Halsey is actually a wildland firefighter. Not only does he understand the nature of firestorms from a homeowner perspective, but he's fought wildland fires himself, and knows full well the other side of the coin, the perspective of the men and women who put their lives on the line to protect homes (including yours) and other structures from fire. I would suggest that his is, in fact, one of the most balanced perspectives on the matter to be found - and part of his motivation for becoming a wildland firefighter was to broaden his understanding on the matter.

I highly encourage for you (and anyone living in Southern California fire country) to read his book, "Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California, Revised and Updated" because it explains why proposals such as the County's are actually more likely to create a greater threat of fire than exists now.

[Flag](#)

[Like](#)

[Reply](#)



Joe Friday 3 days ago in reply to Rokky

Once those wildfires get out of control the strong east winds will drive them towards the coast and then Judge we all feel the heat.

=====

So I guess you voted in favor of Prop A to fund a county fire department? Excessive clearing of brush cannot keep fires small. Firefighters can keep fires small.

[Flag](#)

[Like](#)

[Reply](#)



Palehorse 3 days ago in reply to Joe Friday

"Firefighters can keep fires small."

Then where in the Hell were they during Laguna, Cedar and Harris? For every fire they keep small they set the stage for the fire that is impossible to keep small.

[Flag](#)

[Like](#)

[Reply](#)



Joe Friday 2 days ago in reply to Palehorse

Well, OK, you picked three mega-fires that occurred during extreme conditions to prove your example.

Over 99% of fires are currently extinguished by firefighters before they get that big. If there were more firefighters that percentage would increase. And the NIST study of the Trails area of RB, showed that firefighters were very successful at saving homes that they reached in

time. Additional firefighters would allow more home to be reached in time.

Quick, what's the spotting distance of a chaparral fire in wind driven conditions? Answer... a lot further than the 500 feet the supervisors want to clear. Commonly one half to one mile. Infrequently two to three miles.

So, to recap, additional firefighters will help keep fires small. And the large firebreaks that the supervisors propose will not stop large wind-driven fires. See the fallacy of spending money on wholesale clearing instead of additional firefighters?

Flag

Like Reply



Palehorse 2 days ago in reply to Joe Friday

Joe,

That wasn't my point. My point is as long as firefighters pounce on every fire it only saves up the unburned fuel. After years the saved fuel from a multitude of fires reaches a quantity that, once ignited, defies any and all attempts to control it. Let the damn things burn... protect lives and buildings, the rest grows back even without the erosion control weed seeds.

Just the facts.

PS. I know where the firefighters were... they were running for their lives like everyone with any sense did.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to Palehorse

Palehorse, more than 70,000 acres that burned in the 2003 San Diego County fires burned again in 2007, so the problem is not unburned fuel but rather our lack of understanding that large fires have always happened here and will continue to happen. The problem we have is that they are burning at increasing frequencies which is wiping out native ecosystems and replacing them with highly flammable, non-native weeds. For more on this please see our Fire and Science webpage here:

[http://www.californiachaparral.org/firescience....](http://www.californiachaparral.org/firescience...)

Flag

Edit Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to Rokky

Rokky, actually I have been trained as a wildland firefighter, protected our neighborhood during the 2007 fires, and helplessly watched as some of my neighbor's homes burned. Fire protection is serious business and the county should take its responsibility seriously by following the law.

Flag

Reply



shortxcircuit 2 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Fire protection is serious business and the county should take its responsibility seriously by following the law.

Really, and how is stopping the county from performing fire protection measures going to help protect homes?

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to shortxcircuit

Shortxcircuit, we are not stopping the county from performing fire protection measures that would help protect homes. They were planning to clear trees two football field lengths away

from homes and roads. This is not only a waste of time and money, but may eventually end up increasing fire risk by spreading flammable weeds and giving people a false sense of security. The best place to reduce vegetation is directly around homes and communities, not out in the backcountry where few people live.

Flag

Edit

Reply



owl12 3 days ago

If everyone was as idiotic as SD Surfer, starman1, btinbonita, and others, I probably would rather save a toad...or better yet, a "tiddlywink", which doesn't even exist.

Flag

Like

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to owl12

Wow...I don't agree with you so now you say I'm idiotic. You are the problem. You radical environmentalist eco-nazi's want to impose Taliban like living conditions for everyone all in the name of mother earth.

Just go back to your Al Gore shrine and say a few prayers. Oh and while you're at it, you might want to upgrade to a lifetime ELF membership. What a lunatic!

Flag

Like

Reply



SDSurfer 3 days ago in reply to owl12

If everyone was as idiotic as you, we would all believe in man made global warming. And "hope" and "change."

It's obvious the green police care more about their toads and tiddlywinks, you don't have to remind us.

Besides, libs and enviro nazis usually refer to the general public as "stupid," ergo, it's ok to save the wildlife and let people die in a fire.

Flag

Like

Reply



owl12 3 days ago in reply to SDSurfer

LOL. You both seem like the kind of people who need a helmets to just go outside.

Flag

Like

Reply



Blisful 3 days ago

Correction. The article said dead and dying trees. No problem.

Flag

Like

Reply



SDSurfer 3 days ago

 starman1 liked this.

The green police would rather watch people burn to death in a wildfire than disturb their plants and animals.

Flag

Like

Reply



Blisful 3 days ago in reply to SDSurfer

SD, You're joking

Like

Reply

Flag

Like Reply



SDSurfer 3 days ago in reply to Blisful

No, I'm not. Mitigating brush saves lives, and environmentalists are blocking it.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to SDSurfer

SDSurfer, actually we are not blocking vegetation management. We are asking the county to do it where it counts - near homes and communities, not two football field lengths away.

Flag

Edit Reply



Blisful 3 days ago in reply to SDSurfer

Sorry SD, I put the reply in the wrong place. I meant were you kidding about the threat of over development being a thing of the past?

They are very much alive. Maybe hurting in the down cycle but still there. If they could carpet bomb the region with housing it would be a good investment. With a US population of 300 million and climbing, there will be no shortage of people to buy.

Flag

Like Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Blisful

Its true....sad but true.

Flag

Like Reply



Heteromeles 3 days ago in reply to starman1

 carries and 1 more liked this.

You know what's funny: Rick Halsey IS A TRAINED FIRE FIGHTER! Check out his website.

He knows, BETTER THAN YOU DO, what the problem is. Chaparral burns hot. Weeds burn fast. Fast? It means weed fires spread faster than a grown man can run, let alone a firefighter carrying 50 pounds of equipment. Weed fires are far more dangerous than chaparral fires. Why do we cut down chaparral? Because chaparral makes huge flames that scare people. The fires in the weeds around our houses are far more dangerous.

If you clear as the County wanted, you turn the chaparral and forest into weed fields. That means that the fires will spread faster than you can get away from them. If you get caught in one of those fires, YOU WILL DIE, as will the firefighters who are trying to protect you.

Their own experts told them this, and the County ignored it (I was at that meeting, I saw what happened). State law says that preparing for an emergency is not in itself an emergency, and requires environmental review. The County wanted to ignore this.

The County wanted to do two things: 1) Do a political gesture to satisfy the ignorant screamers that they were being protected from fire, and 2) to pay a few bulldozer drivers to scrape lots of acres in the back-country, even if those acres were not in places that would protect anyone. Go look at the fire management plan. It's all there in print.

What the environmental community wants the County to do is to focus its scarce money doing the things that the firefighters, and the environmental community, both know will help protect houses in the back country. If the County does this, the environmental review process will be straightforward (and probably pretty quick, since no one will sue on it), and you'll be safer.

Flag

Like Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Heteromeles

Yes of course, Halsey and the environmental community know whats best. Good-Great, now quit bugging me and go away. (I think Al Gore is calling, better answer that...)

Flag

Like

Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to starman1

Starman1, I don't think this discussion over what is best for San Diego County is about me bugging you, it's about all of us wanting to participate in our government. If you would like to point out a particular fact or idea we have stated that is wrong, we would be more than happy to discuss that.

Flag

Edit

Reply



owl12 3 days ago

 starman1 liked this.

"There is not an imminent danger of any particular fire," he said. "This is the type of thing that ought to have an environmental review."

Enough said. Congrats to Halsey and the Chaparral Institute. No apologies to the willfully ignorant.

Flag

Like

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to owl12

Ah yes...bring on the parade of radical tree huggers to cheer this nonsense on. Hooray! More people will die and houses lost, but hey we saved this bush and that cricket didn't we! Awesome.....

Flag

Like

Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to starman1

Owl12and starman1, the judge was addressing the legal definition of what an "emergency exemption" is all about. If a fire is raging, the fire service does not have to go through a bunch of paperwork to carve a fuel break. That is an "emergency exemption." However, if the county wants to spend \$7 million over a period of 4 years to clear native plant communities in the back country, then they need to have a plan. It just makes sense.

Flag

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

".... If a fire is raging, the fire service does not have to go through a bunch of paperwork to carve a fuel break...."

Thats the point the eco-nazis are missing, (and not necessarily unintentionally)....

I DON'T WANT TO WAIT FOR A RAGING FIRE THEN DECIDE ITS TIME TO CLEAR FUEL. GET IT? It just makes sense.

I lost my home once and don't want to experience that again. Waiting for a raging fire to occur is likely plugging a leak in a ship that has already sunk to the bottom of the ocean.

And the county is not simply running rampant with tractors and weed whackers mowing down

everything in sight. They DO have a plan. They HAVE IDENTIFIED what needs to be done. It just makes sense. The problem is that you people, under the guise of conservation, will NEVER accept ANY form land management that involves anything more than creating a walking path. And you people will protest that.

Fire season is truly year round in San Diego. History and experience has PROVEN that. What the county proposes does fall under the emergency exemption provision. It just makes sense. That you finally found a sympathetic judge to your cause is sad. Hopefully Prager will utilize common sense in his final ruling. It just makes sense.

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[Richard W. Halsey](#) 3 days ago in reply to [starman1](#)

Starman1, I am extremely sorry you lost your home. We nearly lost ours, and many of our neighbors did, in the 2007 fires. As a trained wildland firefighter I understand what can happen. The issue I was addressing above had to do with the legal mumbo-jumbo about what an "emergency exemption" is, not the fact that we do indeed have a fire-prone environment and need to be alert all year. I agree with you that we need to conduct vegetation management on a yearly basis. The problem is that the county is spending scarce tax-payer money in an area that will have minimal impact on reducing fire risk where it matters most - where most of us live. In addition, without analyzing what they are doing in a manner that will allow local citizens to provide input, they may in fact actually increase fire risk by spreading flammable weeds and giving people a false sense of security. Regarding their plan, we've never seen it despite numerous requests. They just say, "Give us the money and trust us." Well, we've been down that road before in this county. The politicians need to be accountable to us. They are trying to avoid that.

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[Reply](#)



[starman1](#) 3 days ago in reply to [Richard W. Halsey](#)

Have a nice day....

[Flag](#)

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



[Blisful](#) 3 days ago

For the Merriam Mountains project developers, and future developers, a tree removal program like this mitigates a major obstacle in their getting the permits to vastly expand development in San Diego. I'm waiting to hear that they have mitigated the water issues by selling the supervisors on an vast new supply of water from the as yet, unbuilt and unapproved California aquaduct.

Developers go to work everyday to put every piece of chess board in place. This is a good example. Thanks UT. Good heads up.

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[SDSurfer](#) 3 days ago in reply to [Blisful](#)

[starman1](#) liked this.

What developers? They are out of business or on the verge. There are more foreclosures in San Diego than new homes being built. Businesses and their paid employees are fleeing California (this must be what you want?), so who on earth would buy these fictional new homes that you speak of.

Seriously, developers are dead and gone. You need to come up with a new boogiemer now.

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[Like](#) [Reply](#)



[JimWells](#) 2 days ago in reply to [SDSurfer](#)

SD Surfer~

Have you been surfing Southern California since before 1970? I suspect not, because if you had, you would remember what the coast was like prior to 1965. The degradation in the Southern California surfing experience that development has made is astounding. If you had experienced the difference, I suspect you would not be so cavalier about the real estate development industry. You would instead remember that during economic downturns, development investors bought cheap, convinced county planners to waive all kinds of requirements in the interest of getting "growth" going again, and then waited for the rebound to make bundles. Any developers that are now out of business will be replaced by hundreds more per each of them when boom times bring again the allure of quick riches.

Flag

Like Reply



Palehorse 3 days ago in reply to SDSurfer

It's called Feast or Famine, as an ex-developer, I like to think of the famine period as a good time to set the table. As for "who on earth would buy these fictional new homes", refer to yesterdays article "Planners say region needs more homes" regarding our increase of one million people in the next forty years.

Flag

Like Reply



myearth 3 days ago in reply to SDSurfer

In every recession, developers work to get lots of big projects approved so they are ready to slap up tens of thousands of houses when conditions improve. They are doing that right now and want to put these developments in places such as Merriam Mountain. This area has high fire risk, inadequate evacuation routes and poor fire fighting infrastructure. The county needs to improve its planning process, starting by not putting people in harm's way to enrich developers.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to Blisful

owl12 liked this.

Exellent point Blisful. By removing native vegetation, land becomes a lot less important from a natural resource perspective, making it easier for developers to claim minimal impacts.

Flag

Edit Reply



Dustoff 3 days ago

starman1 liked this.

O-brother, and what will they say when the next fire hits.

Common sense just went out the window.

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to Dustoff

owl12 liked this.

Dustoff, we're likely to say what we've been trying to get the county to understand for 6 years. The best way to protect lives and property from wildfire is to spend scarce tax-payer dollars to help citizens create defensible space around homes and fuel breaks directly around communities. Clearing trees 500 feet (more than 2 football field lengths) from backcountry roads where few people live is a waste of money. It looks good for politicians who want to say, "Look how many trees we have cut," but such an effort would have done nothing to protect 95% of the homes we lost to fire in 2003 and 2007.

Flag

Edit Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to Dustoff

owl12 liked this.

Please take a moment and find out what you can do to protect your home from fire on our "Protecting Your Home" page on our website here: <http://www.californiachaparral.org/bprotectingy...>

Flag

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Propaganda....(and I remember you running around to the various fire survivor groups trying to push your agenda. We all politely smiled and were glad when you left)

Flag

Like

Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to starman1

Starman1, actually I give a lot of presentations across the state concerning fire safety. I am sorry you didn't find what I had to say to be useful. Most folks do. If you would like to provide me an example of something I actually said, I would be more than happy to discuss it with you. If you don't remember, you can go to our website and find information there that might remind you. Here is a good place to start:

<http://www.californiachaparral.org/bprotectingy...>

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Reply



BTINBONITA 3 days ago

Blisful and 1 more liked this.

OH PLEASE ... clearing dead trees and brush would save human lives BUT it might endanger three toed tiddywinks and lavender breasted toads and in California we all know that little frogs , insects and bushes are more important that humans !!!

Flag

Like

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to BTINBONITA

Thats funny....well said though!

Flag

Like

Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to BTINBONITA

owl12 liked this.

Btinbonita, this really has nothing to do with tiddywinks (not sure what those are). This has to do with using tax-payer money appropriately. \$7 million can go a long way to to help citizens create defensible space around their homes and help educate folks that the main reason homes burn is because of embers entering attics. Cutting trees in the backcountry would have done nothing to save the more than 1,000 homes that were lost to fire in the 2007 Witch Creek Fire.

Flag

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Make up your mind Halsey....are you protecting tax payer dollars or bushes? You are all over the map trying to drum up support for your agenda. Your fingers must be getting tired!

Flag

Like

Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to starman1

We're protecting tax payer dollars and our natural resources starman1. They are not mutually exclusive - something many fail to understand. I will admit thought, getting the truth out does tire one's fingers, but it's well worth it.

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Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Have a nice day....

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Blisful 3 days ago in reply to BTINBONITA

There are hugh swaths of countryside out there where people live within 500 to a 1000 ft from each other. A law like this removes a major obstacle to permitting. I can easily envision a back country that looks a lot different than it does today.

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Blisful 3 days ago

The permits to build in the back country would have had a much tougher time going through if in the environmental impact statements something had been said about deforestation being part of the mitigation.

This is sneaky, backdoor, fine print, politics at its worst. You own property out there you own the risks. This is the kind of stuff that's turning San Diego into a crappy paved over slab.

Flag

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Reply



imgettingfedup 3 days ago in reply to Blisful

starman1 liked this.

Blis,
The operative word in your last paragraph is "own". Landowners bought and paid for the right to do what they want with the land they own. Your logic clearly illustrates how the eco-nazis and other liberal groups want to restrict individual liberties in favor of what they tout as the "greater good".

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Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to imgettingfedup

owl12 liked this.

Dear imgettingfedup, you might want to check out Godwin's law regarding the use of the term "Nazi" in this context. Regarding private property, enshrined in our laws is the concept that land owners cannot do everything want. This is why we have zoning laws. You can't open a cement factory in the middle of a neighborhood. While such a restriction prevents a land owner from making money on such use, most people would agree that the negatives on society outweigh the property rights of the owner in this situation. With fire, people who own property in the backcountry are being heavily subsidized by the rest of us for fire protection. This is unfair taxation. If we really do believe in a totally free market, then private property owners in the backcountry should not expect government to be responsible for protecting their land from fire and mitigating damage the owner may cause to the region's water supply by stripping off the watershed vegetation.

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Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to imgettingfedup

For more info on watersheds and the impact of unnecessary clearing, please see our webpage here:

<http://www.californiachaparral.org/threatstochoa...>

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Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

PROPAGANDA....

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Reply



Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to starman1

starman1, could you actually point out something we have said that is untruthful? At that point we can have an interesting discussion. Otherwise, all that happens is finger pointing and name calling. This issue is too important for that.

Flag

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Reply



Blisful 3 days ago in reply to imgettingfedup

I'm not sure if you support or disapprove of what I said. But, I don't disapprove of a property owner clearing their land if they choose. But, this proposal opens the door to something much bigger than what goes on on private property.

They're proposing clearing 500 ft in all directions of roads and structures. With all the roads and current structures and future roads and structures out there it amounts to deforestation. I don't know about you, but I like the trees.

Flag

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Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to Blisful

Blisful, I agree with you in terms of allowing a property owner to remove vegetation that will reduce fire risk. And yes, this project goes way beyond reasonable vegetation management. That's the issue - reasonable. What is really going on is that the county is operating under a panic mentality and has decided that laws don't matter. We've seen this before. Under their current criteria, they could clear nearly all of Palomar Mountain of trees because there are roads and houses scattered all over the place. Would they do such a thing? We don't know, which is why they need to follow the law and have a plan the public can comment on.

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Reply



Blisful 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Richard, Does the potential for removal of living trees exist along with low lying vegetation?

Flag

Like

Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to Blisful

Blisful, the current project says the removal "dead and dying" trees and allows for some shrubs, but since they have not detailed their plans, it is really hard to tell or hold them accountable if they fail to follow their initial description. They have also indicated that they can use chemicals to remove vegetation, so we are not sure as to the extent of that either.

Flag

Edit Reply

 outdooroguy 3 days ago

 starman1 liked this.

A more accurate discription would be a "misguided attack against our communities". These fanatical environmentalists misuse poorly written laws to promote a hands off preservation management scheme that have failed both our communities and our natural environment. You have nothing to be proud of Judge Prager and Richard Halsey.

Flag

Like Reply

 JimWells 2 days ago in reply to outdooroguy

outdooroguy~

I think you may have misunderstood that the apporoach that Halsey champions is NOT a "hands-off" one. Many people are so afraid of any limits upon their "rights" to do whatever the F they want to that they brand any nay-sayers with the broad brush of "fanatical environmentalists", as if all environmentalism is radical. Are you one of those broad-bruch weilders?

What Halsey advocates for is to focus work where it has the best chance of being effective, and avoiding wasting money on actions that have little chance of success. If you have real evidence that he is incorrect about ether of those assessments, let's hear it! Otherwise, you are just another sheep in the herd going to slaughter while being a mouthpiece for the slaughters saying "this way to safety".

Flag

Like Reply

 Palehorse 3 days ago in reply to outdooroguy

Please define "hands off preservation management". Do you mean to allow nature to run its course unimpeded by humans, i.e. "let it grow, let it burn"? Or do you mean "let it grow, don't let it burn" as the Forest Service espouses? Personally I prefer the hands off approach, what could be a better management plan than no management at all. The various fire services should only be used to protect personal property or life and limb. If that were the case "hands off" wouldn't be so bad, except for the chagrin for Mr. Halsey when an area is twice burnt to soon.

Flag

Like Reply

 Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to outdooroguy

 owl12 liked this.

Outdooroguy, I'm actually quite a normal guy. The real issue here is not my mental health, but why county leaders have failed to follow a law that allows citizens the opportunity to hold them accountable. If a huge powerline were to be planned to go through your neighborhood, the law we are forcing the county to follow would allow you and your neighbors an opportunity to challenge the project. What the county has done in this situation is say, "We always know best and we don't care about what citizens think." We need more opportunities to control what our government does, not less.

Flag

Edit Reply

 donttredonme 3 days ago

 starman1 liked this.

We dont care about people. We dont care that this will add costs to an already expensive undertaking. We dont care if this delays the process of making areas safer in wildfires. We dont care if we delay so long, or stop altogether, and another fire wipes out homes that might have been saved. We are having a fair rainfall year so far. Lots of new growth this spring that will dry out come summer and fall, fall = fire season. Trust us we are here to help.Not!

Flag

Like Reply



Richard W. Halsey 3 days ago in reply to donttredonme

 owl12 liked this.

Actually Donttredonme we care a lot about people. It's the government we are having a problem with. The Board of Supervisors ignored a law that allows you and me to hold them accountable. The project they are proposing ignores what we have learned over the past 10 years about fire. Instead of focusing tax-payer dollars in areas that are of highest risk, they are cutting down trees far from where most people live. They have already spent more than a million dollars on spray paint to mark trees and on overhead for a consultant to buy the spray cans. Imagine what we could do this this kind of money to help people reduce fire risk directly around their homes?

Flag

Reply



starman1 3 days ago in reply to Richard W. Halsey

Wow you really see yourself as hero huh?

Look up the definition of Megalomaniac please. Its you....

Flag

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Reply



JimWells 2 days ago in reply to starman1

 starbrite and 1 more liked this.

Starman1~

I have read all your comments hereupon so far. You insist on personality attacks, so instead of staying to reasoned argument, I dip my toe in your waters . . . Dude, you lost your home to a wildfire. The anger you feel from that is burned into you. Your government somehow failed to deliver the protections you thought it promised you. You want the situation fixed so that it can never happen again. You see Halsey as a threat to that. You cannot prevail in a discussion of the facts (every time you finally realize that, you post only "have a nice day."), so you attack the messenger.

I cannot completely put myself in your shoes, but here are a few things from where I have stood in my own:

1) I do NOT believe in the modern American paradigm that says "When I gamble and win, the spoils are mine, but when I gamble and lose, society bails me out. And the role of government is as a tool for clever and monied interests to use to preferentially divert finite tax monies to provide the infrastructure and other supports that preferentially benefit my personal social and economic goals. " Instead, I believe in the American paradigm of our founding days: "Capitalism is a gamble. Win or lose, the outcome is mine, and mine alone."

2) What people chose to do on their own properties (but do not forget that they still pay "rent" to the government, in the form of property taxes, so do they really "own" it?) may be theirs and theirs alone to decide, but if and when it harms anyone else on any other properties, then what? What if you completely devegetated your property, mine was an inholding in it, and the absence of vegetation on your property led to extreme drying out of the vegetation on mine and it went up in flames and burnt my house down? It gets kinda' complicated real fast.

3) When I purchased 30 acres in the Oregon Cascade mountains in 1986, up against National Forest in a narrow river valley, I consciously chose NOT to purchase fire insurance. If minimizing the chances of loss from wildfire were a high priority for me, I would have stayed in the city. The risks of wildfire loss and/or cougar maulings were acceptable to me along with the myriads of benefits of living in that place. Before I purchased, I researched the fire histories and fire regimes, as well as what would be the fire response entites and protocols for my property. I dug ponds and installed water holding tanks uphill from structures. I improved gravity-water systems.

Starman1, I can't say if (or how well) you did your homework prior to choosing to purchase the home that eventually burnt, but I suspect you did not do it well, if at all, or you might not have purchased where you did. And, so far, it does not appear that you are ever going to do such homework. You would rather keep your head in the sand about the realities of wildland fire and government fire response capabilities, believe that people like Richard Halsey who claim they are working hard for the best of all are really just mamby-pamby nature addicts

with no practical sense, and be prepared to complain over and over again when you lose and the government does not protect you from your own ignorance and the forces of nature -- only instead of realizing that they NEVER COULD NOR EVER WERE GOING TO, you will have people such as Halsey to blame for not allowing the government to protect you.

I have a challenge for you: Find a place where government has been allowed unfettered discretion to remove vegetation to make homes safe from wildfire, buy a home there, and then keep in touch about how wonderful it is to live there. If there is still any vegetative ecosystem left, when a wildfire someday destroys a home there, write and tell how it is that happened. I was not there at the time, but I hear there used to be a forest of Cedars in Lebanon that is now a desert. No wildfires possible, and it is a wonderful place to live.

Richard Halsey's analyses of the Coastal Chaparral ecosystem, particularly its fire ecology, may be incorrect. No one has a monopoly on truth, and that goes for you in spades, because whether or not Halsey's views on the fire ecology of coastal chaparral are valid, so far your arguments that the county's proposed plan will be effective enough to be worth the money appear to me to be wishful thinking without much to substantiate them. My experiences in fire ecology in the Pacific Northwest tell me that Halsey's conclusions run against the grain of classical modern fire salvage ecology thought (yes, the cutting-edge of what you, starman1, might wish to refer to as "eco-terrorists, so does that make Halsey with them or against them?) But I have studied Halsey's analyses, and find them sound. In fact, brilliantly inciteful puzzle-solving. And, they jive quite well with childhood memories of growing up in the Southern California Coastal Chaparral (1953-1978). Instead of remaining angry at everyone else for not looking after your safety, why don't you try to understand the complexities of the fire ecology of the coastal chaparral, and empower YOURSELF to look after your own safety? Halsey has repeatedly asked you in posts to identify even ONE thing from his work that he claims is a fact but that you do not believe is, so that you two can discuss the matter and get to the bottom of it. All you can seem to get out is your OPINION that it is "propoganda". My money says that Halsey would be THE FIRST to retract or amend any of his facts or analyses once he was made aware of any errors, and to give YOU credit for bringing it to the fore. Heck, you might even become a "megalomaniac" like Halsey and think you actually might be able to help other people!

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Reply



starbrite 2 days ago in reply to JimWells

Absolutely, positively, brilliantly, and without a doubt WELL SAID. You, sir, are very clearly well-informed and educated on this matter. Thank you for your responses. (You said everything I've been trying all day to compose, but just couldn't manage to articulate.)

As to the point where Halsey's conclusions run against the grain of classical modern fire salvage ecology thought, unless you are referring to something else that I have misinterpreted (in which case, please enlighten - this is a topic I am keenly interested on), I offer this: what is the traditional model for fire behavior and fire salvage in ecosystems such as riparian and timber biomes does not work in the chaparral system. They are entirely different ecosystems, and fire regimes between the two are different. I will reference Halsey's book "Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California" on page 29, where he explains that an apparent misapplication of observations on fire behavior and regime patterns in dry ponderosa pine has led to the widespread belief that chaparral will follow the same patterns. Fire behavior in Southern California is fairly unique in this country; the models used for the classic forest fire cannot be blanketed on our specific ecosystems; and yet somehow the misconception persists, leading the common citizen and even some firefighters to believe that the same type of vegetation management used in, say, Tahoe will work just as well in San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, Alameda, and Santa Barbara Counties, etc.

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Reply



JimWells 2 days ago in reply to starbrite



starbrite liked this.

starbrite~

You described what I was referring to. Conclusions from most forest ecosystems in the PNW are that "let it burn" (boy, is THAT a misnomer!) approaches are the best (all factors considered) approaches to shepherding them back towards fire-

absorbing ecosystem status. Too many details to get into them here. Halsey identified a Catch-22 with that approach when applied to Coastal Chaparral systems. But, more importantly, he puzzled out what approach to take instead. It is multi-step, but so are ALL fire-management approaches worth any salt (which is one reason why "let it burn" is a gross oversimplification of that philosophy).

Halsey's critics would have their audiences believe that Halsey is a "hands-off" advocate in order to not disturb the non-game and other non-commercial species. That is completely incorrect. Halsey's approach calls for a LOT of hands-on action. The problem is, the actions he calls for require land and home owners to get off their butts and take individual and collective personal responsibility, instead of demanding that Big Brother wipe their behinds for them so they don't have to be distracted away from the pursuit of fast-lane lifestyles.

The days of "come to southern California, the land of endless opportunities to just grab all you can, full-speed-ahead and damn the torpedoes" is long over. It was over at least 30 years ago, but Ronald Reagan came on the scene and gave Californians (and then all Americans) the false message of renewed hope that resources were not limited, after all, and that arrogant selfishness was a virtue. Under his rules, we went from being a lender to a debtor nation, and should it be any surprise that California is a little ahead of the rest of the states towards bankruptcy? Should it be any surprise that Orange County was a little ahead of the state? OC was the pinnacle of the mad rush to replace all of the natural world with concrete, asphalt, and invader-species landscaping. Reagan was first a southern CA guy, then a US guy.

Got a little tangential, there. Let's see . . . oh, yeah, the point was that the free ride in the Southern California Coastal Chaparral ecosystem is a thing of the past. It is either pay-the-piper time, or at least from here on out it must be pay-as-you-go. Anyone responsible for any land management, be it one small parcel or square miles, must now be knowledgeable about how the natural and human systems they are in function. They must make decisions to take actions that do not ignore the realities of capabilities and incapacities of both nature and of public services. The accumulated floaters and jets from hundreds of years of trying to turn all of California into Disneyland, Hollywood, and the Shangri-la of Civilization are coming home to roost. Nature will not bend to our wishes and human bureaucracies will ultimately become dysfunctional from infested individual greed and corruption. It is going to be: 'take personal responsibility or sit down and shut up'.

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JimWells 2 days ago in reply to starman1

Starman1~

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Richard W. Halsey 2 days ago in reply to starman1

Starman, let's focus on the issue, not personalities.

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