

From: Elisabeth Landis
Sent: Friday, April 04, 2014 1:46 PM
To: Leon Freeman
Cc: Emma Howard; Joseph Decruyenaere
Subject: Some interesting photos

Here are some interesting photos that illustrate the effectiveness of clearing 200 feet from structures, but ignoring the flammable landscaping in the first 30 feet from the house.

These photos were taken before and after the Corral Canyon (Santa Monica Mountains) fire. This is in unincorporated County.
See attached.

What is vitally needed is General Plan landscape regulations for structures, particularly residential structures, in the "Wildland Urban Interface". Emphasis must be placed on no vines against the structure walls or roofs, no plants at all against the house (borders of decorative brick/tile or different colors of gravel or decomposed granite or pebbles are possibilities) especially where there are screened vents under the house or under the eaves.

No trees within 30 feet of the house.

No flammable trees within 100 feet of the house. Examples of flammable trees are conifers (pines, junipers, Italian cypress), eucalyptus species, acacias, /Shinus/ species such as Brazilian pepper or Peruvian pepper (erroneously called California pepper), palm trees. Examples of fire-resistant trees are mature coast live oak, mature toyon, healthy western sycamores. Coast live oaks are known as "ember-catchers" because their tannin-filled thick leaves and thick bark catch flying embers and extinguish them. They are a great windbreak. In fact, healthy mature ceanothus trees are fire-resistant for much the same reasons.

Note that low shrubs, concrete block/mortared stone or brick/chainlink/boulder fences will interrupt windflow especially if the wildfire is not a crown fire. Because we are in a mode of water conservation, the best groundcovers are not succulents, ivy, creeping /Myoporum/, or European vines that require a lot of water and develop a lot of flammable woody mass under their leafy canopies. Small groups of shrubs that grow no higher than three feet and that are surrounded by a border of stones, bricks or pavers can be grown in the next 70 feet from the house. These groups would be staggered and no more than 20 feet apart. Their job is to spread roots through the ground to stabilize the fuel mod zone and to break up wind flow. The plants need to be maintained with dead material removed underneath the plants and light pruning to promote healthy growth.

Native trees must not be "lollipopped". These chaparral trees grow perhaps ten to twelve feet tall. They depend on winter rains to soak the ground nutrients free for their roots to process and feed them during the winter through April. During the rest of the year they depend on their new leaves to process food for the whole plant and the mature leaves to shade the trunk and branches to prevent sunburn and overheating of the plant. When crews arrive to do "fuel mod clearance" they remove most of the new leaves, expose the trunks for heights of up to 6 feet and remove all root sprouts.

The chaparral trees are left with too little canopy and too hot a trunk to produce and move nutrients through the plant. Erosion exposes their root boles and roots. Usually these plants die in a few years. See attached photos of typical results.

Let's look at this realistically. The current mode of "fuel mod" causes exactly the same damage as a wildfire causes that burns healthy habitat.

The difference is that "fuel mod" clears the habitat every year, while wildfire traditionally only burned habitat every 40 to 100 years. "Fuel mod" clearance kills the habitat that stabilized these slopes, stored rainwater, fed and protected a very biodiverse spectrum of creatures.

"Fuel mod" as it is currently practiced is destroying all flora and fauna and is destroying their abilities to recover. It is bad management of natural resources. For your information I have spent about twenty years studying various post-wildfire areas in the Santa Monica Mountains, the Simi Hills, the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains and the northern Santa Ana Mountains.

It is time for the Los Angeles County General Plan Housing Element and Natural Resource Element to develop better management practices. Since constant increase in wildfire frequency, increase in acreage of erodable bare earth and loss of watershed resources affect local climate, the County Climate Action Plan should consider how to introduce better management practices of County natural resources.

Betsey Landis

Los Angeles / Santa Monica Mountains Chapter California Native Plant Society

Fire PixA,Donut Clearance_CorralCynHouse_before-1a, unknown source



Fire,DonutClearance_CorralCaynHouse_after1a,MWitter



More erosion east side of MCR north of 3744,20140302



Severe erosion exposes root boles east side of MCR North of 3744,20140302

