

SECTION IV: PRE-FIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A: FIRE PREVENTION

Defensible Space/Fire Safe Inspections

Riverside Unit is conducting Fire Safe Inspections on structured parcels utilizing the LE-100 program throughout the unincorporated areas of the county. The LE-100 form contains a compilation of codes, from both the Public Resources Code and the Riverside County Ordinance 787, which adopts the California Fire Code. This allows for the utilization of PRC 4291, and some more specific regulation required by the County Ordinance.

As a part of the MAST Organization the private lands in the San Jacinto Mountains are being inspected by three different agencies, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection/Riverside County Fire, the United States Forest Service, and The Idyllwild Fire Protection District.

LE 100 Inspection Reports 2009 - 2011

YEAR	2009	2010	2011
Number of Inspections	34,380	32,896	2,561
Number of Compliance	888	1,455	553
Number of Violations	4,122	3,637	10

These numbers reflect inspections in LRA and SRA by Riverside County Fire and CAL FIRE

LE100 Inspection Reports by DPA

DPA	LRA			SRA		
YEAR	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
Number of Inspections	11,157	10,520	2,422	23,223	22,376	139
Number of Compliance	693	716	508	195	739	45
Number of Violations	2,243	1,911	10	1,879	1,726	0

These numbers reflect inspections in LRA and SRA by Riverside County Fire and CAL FIRE

Hazardous Vegetation Inspections on Vacant Parcels

Riverside Unit also conducts inspections and enforcement on vacant parcels in the unincorporated areas of the County utilizing Riverside County Ordinance 695, in both the SRA and LRA. The Hazard Abatement section of the Fire Prevention Bureau is staffed by Riverside County funded personnel which conduct the inspections and enforcement. Unlike the LE100 program those properties that are in violation and not corrected by the property owners are abated by Riverside County Fire Contractors and later billed or their property receives a special assessment on their property tax bill.

The program's current primary inspection area focuses on the western portion of Riverside County. It currently does not include the High Fire Hazard Areas of Sage and Anza. Later implementation in these areas would require additional funding for the Hazard Abatement

Office. Advances in geographic information technology and mobile computing would assist the Hazard Abatement Program in advancing into these areas as well as streamlining the current internal processes. In 2010 a fire occurred in the “La Sierra” area quickly moving upslope threatening homes, abatement under Ordinance 695 in this area assisted in saving structures.

Riverside County Ordinance 695 Inspection Reports 2009 - 2011

YEAR	2009	2010	2011
Parcels Inspected	38868	35847	57,440
Notices of Violation Mailed	6897	10351	10,566
Parcels cleared by Contractor	730	1332	1,276

Dead, dying or Neglected Orchards Inspections

Riverside Unit conducts inspections for dead, dying and neglected orchards under Riverside County Ordinance 772. Due to the increase in water costs and the economic times many thriving orchards have been left to die and in turn have created a hazardous fire concern since many of these orchards lie in close proximity to housing developments. The Hazard Abatement Staff inspects and enforces this ordinance, if a property is determined to be in violation of the Ordinance the owner is sent a Notice of Violation and the property is posted as such. If the property owner does not abate the property themselves a Contractor is hired to abate the property and the property owner is billed and/or a special assessment is placed on their property taxes. Fifteen (15) orchards in 2010 and twelve (12) in 2011 were posted for abatement.

Railroad Right Away Inspections

In 2010 the Riverside Unit began conducting inspections along railroad right of ways under Public Resource Code 4296.5 and utilization of the Railroad Fire Prevention Guide. A five (5) year fire history was conducted to identify inspection criteria. It was determined thirty (30) railroad caused fires were identified with ten (10) of those being SRA and the remaining twenty (20) in the LRA. All violations were corrected.

Railroad Right Away Inspections	2010	2011
Mile of track Inspected	195	45
LRA Violations	7	3
SRA Violations	4	6

Power line Inspections

Riverside Unit conducts Power line Inspections under Public Resource Code 4292 (vegetation clearance around poles) and 4293 (vegetation clearance around power lines) in cooperation with Southern California Edison, Banning Electric and Anza Electric. The inspections are completed by the Hazard Abatement Staff. All violations were corrected.

Power line Inspection Reports 2009 - 2011

YEAR	2009	2010	2011
Poles Inspected	343	10979	10,111
PRC 4292 Violations	27	27	24
PRC 4293 Violations	1	17	10

*Due to staffing shortages inspections were not entirely completed in 2009

Open Burning

Riverside Unit has a problem with persons burning debris and/or burning without a permit. In the Riverside Unit a permit for burning is required for tumbleweeds, Pit style BBQ's and agricultural burning. Riverside County Ordinance 787 CFC Section 105.6.30 requires a permit for open burning unless the fire is for recreational purposes. When it is determined a person conducted open burning without a permit a citation is issued. One hundred and eight-four (184) citations were issued in 2010 under County Ordinance 787 for burning without a permit. Continued enforcement and coordination with the Public Information Section will be necessary to reduce the number of persons burning debris and reduce the amount of fires caused by their unsafe practices. Education in other languages such as Spanish may assist this issue.

Equipment Caused Fire

In the Western portion of Riverside County Equipment caused fires are uniformly everywhere. As the LE100 statistics and the Hazard Abatement Office statistics show the number of property owners in violation of hazardous vegetation on their property is very high. In turn this requires the property owner to abate the property utilizing equipment many times during the incorrect time of the day, using unmaintained equipment or not equipped with spark arrestors. The public information section has assisted in educating the public on the proper manner to use equipment through press releases. Cost recovery for incidents determined to be equipment caused are being pursued at the local and/or Region level. Continued education and coordination with the Public Information Section will be necessary to reduce equipment caused fires. More signage along major roadways may assist this issue.

Children Playing With Fire

Fires caused by children playing with fire are prevalent across the County. The Riverside Unit has personnel from the Fire Prevention Bureau assigned to administer the Juvenile Fire Setter's Program. This program is designed to assist these children in their curiosity about fire and educate them on the dangers associated. Children are either voluntary placed into the program or placed in the program through the Juvenile Court System. Continued education is necessary at a minimum the grade school level in the dangers of fire to reduce the amount of fires caused by children.

Fire Closure Areas

The Whitewater Canyon fire closure area is the most active for persons violating. It is enforced cooperatively with the Bureau of Land Management and Fire Prevention Staff. Signs are displayed each year when the closure takes effect and they are many times destroyed and even more times ignored. Seventy-two (72) citations were issued by Fire Prevention Staff for violating the fire closure under Riverside County Ordinance 787. In 2011 more signs were placed in a more permanent and visible fashion to assist in deterring the public from violating the fire closure. The closure continued to be enforced and resulted in thirty-seven (37) citations being issued. Fire closure maps in **appendix D**.

- ENGINEERING & STRUCTURE IGNITABILITY

Ordinances Regarding Construction

The Riverside Unit has adopted the 2000 Edition of the California Fire Code, which specifies various requirements for the development of new construction within the County. The Fire Protection Planning Section of the Riverside County Fire Department is responsible for ensuring new developments within the county meet the various ordinances pertaining to building homes in the wildland. These ordinances include PRC 4290, PRC 4291, Riverside County Ordinance 787.6, and the 2010 California Building Code, Chapter 7A, Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure.

Unit Staff are working with the local Fire Safe Councils to disseminate information and educate the public on the message of Firewise home construction practices. The LE-100 program at the station level provides for a one-on-one contact with residents. This is the opportunity for residents to discuss what they can do to ensure their homes survivability in the event of a catastrophic wildland Fire.

- INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Public Information & Education Bureau

The CAL FIRE - Riverside Unit Public Information and Education Bureau offers several outreach and public education/awareness programs. Our audiences and methods of education and outreach typically include, but are not limited to:

- K-5 Child Education Programs such as “9-1-1 for Kids,” “Learn Not to Burn,” “I Spot Something Hot,” and “Stop-Drop-and-Roll.”
- The elderly - FEMA’s “Preparing Makes Sense for Older Americans” brochure.
- The disabled.
- Community Groups via community meetings presented by Public Information/ Education staff and fire station personnel.
- FireSafe Councils via planning meetings and workshops with Pre-Fire Management staff and Public Information/Education staff.
- M.A.S.T. via monthly planning and preparedness meetings with Pre-Fire Management, OES, and Public Information/Education staff.
- Monthly fire preparedness and safety message contributions to community newsletters, print, and television media, along with the www.rvcfire.org website.
- The “Ready-Set-Go” interactive web-based preparation guide for homeowners. Access is available via www.readyforwildfire.org, www.rvcfire.org, and the www.fire.ca.gov websites. This program has been presented at all of our partner city council meetings, CSA meetings, and unincorporated communities by affected Battalion Chiefs, fire station personnel, and Public Information/Education staff. A “Ready-Set-Go” handbook is part of this preparedness campaign and has been distributed at community safety fairs throughout the County/Unit.
- Working collaboratively with the Fire Prevention Bureau to inform the public about arson arrests and assistance in seeking information on potential arson suspects via news releases. Working with children in the Juvenile Firesetter Program. Installing prevention/education based road signs.

The CAL FIRE/Riverside Unit and Riverside County Fire Department are pro-active in efforts to raise awareness of the multitude of fire-prone areas in our jurisdiction and the threats they pose. By maintaining informational road signs and utilizing the www.rvcfire.org and www.fire.ca.gov websites, we have the ability to not only provide current incident information but the ability to communicate our fire prevention messages. In February 2011, the CAL FIRE/Riverside Unit implemented a “Twitter” social networking account that links the “follower” back to our website to be informed of significant incidents that may affect the follower’s community – always with an attached safety message regarding wildland fire preparedness, evacuation information, brush clearance requirements, hazard mitigation information, or a myriad other regional or seasonal messages. To date, we have nearly 900 followers of our “CALFIRERRU” Twitter account and tens of thousands of readers of the www.rvcfire.org website.

Future plans to provide fire safety education to the public include:

- Fire safety messages provided on freeway frontage billboards.
- PSA's displayed in movie theaters, on shopping carts, on grocery store and gasoline station monitors, and streaming video on our www.rvcfire.org website and www.youtube.com.
- Continued fire safety school programs.
- Presence at community events and safety fairs.
- Radio, television, and print media PSA's.
- Continued and expanded presence in the social media market.

B: VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Vegetation Management Program Projects

Summary of the Vegetation Management Program

The Riverside Unit integrated its Vegetation Management and Pre-Fire Engineering Programs in January 1998 and created a Pre-fire Management Division. This integration has combined the planning and assessment tools developed for the 1995 California Fire Plan with the resources of the Vegetation Management Program (VMP) in order to implement fire hazard/fuels reduction projects in the most appropriate areas of Riverside County. The VMP Program has been used very successfully for fire hazard reduction in Riverside County since the program was first created. The use of fire weather, fire history, and fuels information provided through the Fire Plan provides a foundation to explain and justify to management and to the public why we are spending limited VMP resources and staff time in these high fire hazard areas.

The focus of VMP in Riverside County has historically been and will continue to be directed at fire hazard/fuels reduction and ecological restoration projects. The presence of numerous endangered species throughout Southern California has made burning for native habitat restoration a valuable tool. In most cases, these restoration burns also lend themselves to reduce fuel loads that pose a fire hazard to adjacent urban development. There is very little grazing activity in the county and therefore burning for range improvement has not been a priority. Pre-fire staff is assisting several ecological reserves with the development of fire management plans that will involve fuels management as a component; additionally these plans assist fire managers in pre-planned control objective during wildfire events. Chipping is also a very appropriate tool that is used, particularly where there are smoke sensitive issues or where there is too great a threat to use prescribed fire.

Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) grants from the USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and similar (USFS) United States Forest Service grants are often required to help finance these critical projects. These grants are awarded on an annual basis and must meet the criteria set forth by each agency.

Past Projects

Lake Mathews VMP

The Management Plan for the Lake Mathews/Estelle Mountain Reserve specifies the use of prescribed fire to reduce or eliminate the non-native annual grasses and return the landscape to the native grass and sage scrub species. The vegetation within the Reserve is comprised primarily of non-native annual grassland, with smaller areas of mixed chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and California juniper woodland. Ultimately, VMP plans will be developed to implement prescribed fire on the 6,478 acres within the northern half of the Reserve. The area has been divided into forty-three (43) prescribed fire units that will be burned on a rotational basis that best mimics the natural fire cycle. Three units totaling 500 acres were scheduled for burning during the spring of 2002. However, numerous lawsuits prevented any work from occurring on that project. It is currently suspended pending a resolution of those legal issues.

In spring 2003, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) approached CAL FIRE about conducting VMP on lands owned by MWDF in the Lake Mathews Project area. We are currently working with the MWD environmental consultant in pursuing the identification of specific project units in order to proceed with environmental review.

Tenaja VMP

The Tenaja VMP project is located west of Murietta along the De Luz Creek drainage south of the intersection of Tenaja Road and Avenida La Cresta. The northern and eastern portion of the project is comprised mostly of large residentially zoned parcels. The central and southern project area is conservation and park land primarily covered with chaparral plants on the slopes and Engelmann Oak woodlands in the drainages.

The purpose of the Tenaja VMP is to reduce hazardous fuel loading in the upper De Luz Creek watershed. Historically, large fires initiating in the De Luz, Fallbrook, and Camp Pendleton areas have burned with the prevailing on shore winds and threatened the now developed areas on the Santa Rosa Plateau. This project is part of a larger plan to reduce the fuel loading adjacent to the plateau communities of Tenaja and La Cresta. Prescribed burning has taken place on the Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve immediately to the east since 1987 and additional projects are planned to the northwest on both state responsibility lands and the Cleveland National Forest within the next three years. Combined, these projects will provide a significant buffer against fires moving with the onshore prevailing winds from the south and west toward these now heavily developed communities.

Specifically, the Tenaja VMP will use prescribed fire to treat 364 acres of watershed in and adjacent to the De Luz Creek drainage. The northern end of the project will tie into Tenaja road and a newly constructed fuel break along the Rancho California Road easement. The west and east flanks will primarily utilize existing road systems with some new hand line construction. The southern end of the project area is steep with no existing roads and will therefore involve mostly construction of hand line. The interior vegetation will be burned in a mosaic pattern to develop age classes that are less likely to sustain major wildfires and enhance wildlife habitat.

The primary objectives of the prescribed burn project are to reduce fuel loading in the chaparral plant species and develop a mosaic of age and species diversified vegetative cover. An overall reduction in chaparral fuel loading of 50 to 80% is desired. Engelmann oak woodlands will not be treated and will be protected from adjacent burning operations. Approximately 300 acres have been completed to date and as of 2003, the Tenaja project was incorporated into the Santa Rosa Plateau Reserve Project because the land involved was given to the Reserve. Additional acreage will be added to the remaining balance of 64 acres and it was slated for burning in fall 2003 or spring/summer 2004. Currently, the Tenaja project is held up in litigation. The project remains open, but with no foreseeable short-term resolution to the lawsuits.

Lake Mathews/Estelle Mountain Core Reserve

The Lake Mathews/Estelle Mountain (LMEM) Core Reserve is located in western Riverside County and is currently 11,232 acres in size. The Reserve's current configuration and management structure has its origins in a 1996 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for the Stephen's kangaroo rat. The Reserve Management Committee (RMC) is comprised of representatives from the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Land Management, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, and the Center for Natural Lands Management.

The 1993 fire management plan serves as a foundation and model to expand the planning effort into the LMEM Core Reserve. In May 1998, the RMC initiated the expanded fire management planning effort in cooperation with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The expanded plan, completed in the spring of 1999, addresses pre-fire fuels management and fire suppression planning issues as they relate to the protection of public safety and endangered species habitat management.

Pre-fire management projects will focus on the implementation of prescribed fire on 6,478 acres within the northern half of the reserve. The area has been divided into forty-three (43) prescribed fire units that will be burned on a rotational basis that best mimics the natural fire cycle. Pre-fire management efforts in this area will focus on fuel breaks, weed abatement and focused fire prevention activities aimed at keeping fire out of the area in order to facilitate regeneration of native species. In 2004 prescribed fire had been utilized on 1,006 acres in the reserve, and the plan remains open to continue the rotation of burning the prescribed fire units.

Mount Baldy

The Mount Baldy VMP is an emergency fuels reduction project that will be done cooperatively with the San Bernardino National Forest. This 272-acre project represents a critical piece of ground that is the last remaining link tying the former West Ridge II VMP project with the 1999 Mixing Fire. Without treating these fuels, which include large acreages of dead chaparral resulting from the drought, a fire starting along State Highway 74 in the Dry Creek area would be able to sweep uphill to threaten Mountain Center and Baldy Mountain Village. Although only 75 acres of SRA would be treated in this co-op project, these acres are critical to the project due to topography. Three-quarters of this project was completed in Fall 2003, and the remaining one-quarter is scheduled for Spring 2005.

Water Canyon VMP

This project consists of three treatment sites as follows: one (1) prescribed fire in the Water Canyon area, and maintenance of three existing un-maintained fuel breaks surrounding the Oak Glen area.

The Oak Glen area surrounds Beaumont, an interface community identified in the August 17, 2001 Federal Register, Part III Department of Agriculture Urban Wildland Interface Communities document. The community and surrounding area is directly above wildland fuels with three or more homes/business structures per acre, five watersheds, power lines, transportation, and shared municipal services. The overall purpose is to modify or break up the fuels in such a way as to lesson catastrophic fire and its threat to public and firefighter safety and damage to property.

Local CAL FIRE crews and equipment were assigned to the three project sites to remove hazardous fuel buildup during non-fire season and provide maintenance of the sites during early fire season, and also conduct a prescribed fire.

This project was completed in 2009; the unit is involved with maintenance work in the project.

Red Hill North / Red Hill South VMP

The unincorporated community of Pine Cove, located in the San Jacinto Mountains of Riverside County, has a population of approximately 1500 permanent residents on 2200 improved parcels. Pine Cove is situated predominately on a western/southwest aspect of the San Jacinto Mountain range at 6200' elevation and is "mid-slope" between the San Jacinto Valley to the west at 1700' in elevation and San Jacinto Peak at 10,804' in elevation to the east. Lands owned and protected by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service/San Bernardino National Forest and San Jacinto State Park surround the community of Pine Cove.

The vegetative community is comprised of mature chaparral with a mixed conifer forest over story. The predominant under story species include Manzanita, Chaparral Whitethorn, Deer Brush and Chamise. The tree over story consists of mixed stands of Jeffery Pine, Ponderosa Pine, Coulter Pine, Incense Cedar, White Fire and Sugar Pine. There is no recorded fire history for the area since fire records started being kept around 1924; therefore it is assumed the vegetative community is at least 75 years old.

The Riverside Unit has re-entered into agreements with the current private property owners whose properties lie within the Red Hill Vegetation Management Program and established new projects such as the **Maxwell Trail** and **Point of Rocks VMP's**, which add protection from a fire spreading down slope into the communities from the north and east, project area encompasses 500 acres. In addition to maintaining the prescribed fuel loading levels completed, it is proposed that CAL FIRE increases the treatment area within the same private properties to broaden the "shaded fuel break" and create a wider buffer of protection. The actual width of the treated area will vary depending on the type of vegetation and topography. The proposed fuel reduction project will be completed by piling dead vegetation, thinning brush and small trees with chainsaws and placing this material into small piles to be burned in cool weather or chipped where accessible. The net treatment area is approximately 750 acres.

This fuel reduction project is part of a larger plan to tie several fuel treatment projects together and thus provide a continuous fuel modification zone along the western edge of the San Jacinto Mountain communities

These projects have the potential to reduce the damages from wildland fires spreading into the community of Pine Cove, Idyllwild, and Fern Valley. Fire history records indicate that fires in the surrounding area are traditionally slope and wind driven, burning in an easterly direction. The only exceptions to this historical data are those fires that are wind driven during a "Santa Ana" wind event.

The proposed project is intended to provide a buffer of protection to the communities of Pine Cove and Idyllwild by reducing fuel-loading levels and to provide an area to which fire suppression forces can safely take action on an encroaching fire.

The original 1991 Red Hill Vegetation Management Project was supported by the Idyllwild/Pine Cove Coordinated Resource Management Planning Group (CRMP) and by the Pine Cove Property Owners Association. The project was also well supported by the participating property owners. In addition, the 1991 Red Hill Vegetation Management Project was conducted in conjunction with the U.S.D.A. Forest Service/San Bernardino National Forest fuel break project that “linked” federal lands that separated the private property parcels of the original project.

Since this project was initially envisioned in the 2000 RRU Fire Plan, the massive tree mortality and resulting State emergency declaration for the area have occurred. Thousands of trees have died within the project area. Therefore, CAL FIRE is reentering the same project area on multiple occasions, as more trees die and future treatment will be required for several years to come. Insect control crews from Bautista and Oak Glen camp as well as regular grade crews are working on this massive fuel reduction project.

**In 2012, contractors funded by grants, have finished maintenance work on Red Hill South and are planning to continue to Red Hill North. The fuel breaks will need continued maintenance at regular intervals to be effective fuel breaks.

Poppet Flats VMP

The rural community of Poppet Flats is located at the northern end of the San Jacinto Mountains, approximately six miles south of Banning along Highway 243. Within the community there are over 400 private parcels, many of which contain occupied residences. The largest landowner is the Silent Valley Club, which is a 460-acre RV Park housing 850 campsites and 1150 storage units. Lands managed by the San Bernardino National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs surround most of the community. Access in and out is limited to Poppet Flats Road running out to Highway 243 on the east. Secondary access can be made to the southwest; however, it is unreliable due to locked gates at the Soboba Indian Reservation and lack of maintenance.

Poppet Flats sits in a southwest-facing valley, which ranges in elevation from 3200 to 4000 feet. Numerous fires have started on the Soboba Indian Reservation below Poppet Flats as well as recent arson fires along Highway 243 to the northeast. The physical orientation and location of the community places it at extreme risk from the normal southwest wind driven fire as well as the “Santa Ana” wind driven fire from the east. Vegetation within and around the community is composed primarily of chaparral species such as Chamise and Manzanita, however, a significant cover of native California oak species is found along Poppet Creek. The age class of the vegetation varies since several large fires have burned in the area over the last three decades.

Phase one; completed July 2003 involved the construction of the fuel break and truck trail on private, National Forest, and BLM lands east of Poppet Flats Road. Phase two of the project completed the construction of a fuel break north and west of the community. The truck trail was re-constructed to allow access for Type-3 engines and vegetation cleared to create a fuel break with an average width of 100 feet. Actual width will varied in order to create a feathered, mosaic appearance. All cut material will be piled and burned or chipped. Vegetation Management Program (VMP) agreements will be re initiated with private property owners to facilitate work and address environmental concerns on their lands.

In addition to the perimeter fuel modification, a community-chipping program will continue facilitating the disposal of green waste generated by the property owners' annual weed/brush abatement activities. Chipping is accomplished by CAL FIRE fire crews using a State-owned chipper housed at Oak Glen Conservation Camp. Local residents within the community are very supportive of the projects. The Silent Valley Club, which is the largest private landowner within the project area, has committed their support through use of equipment and other resources. The San Bernardino National Forest and Bureau of Land Management are also committed to providing resources and support to the project.

This projects initial work was instrumental in protecting the community during the fatal Esperanza incident in 2007; few residences were lost directly in part of the fuels reduction surrounding the community by all agencies and home owners involved. See **appendix E** for a report on the effectiveness of the fuel break in the Esperanza fire.

Current Projects

El Cariso and Decker Canyon Fuel break Rancho Capistrano

This project will involve the improvement of a fuel break in the El Cariso/Decker canyon area located along Highway 74 west of Lake Elsinore. The location of these communities puts them at extreme risk from wild fires burning under coastal or Santa Ana wind conditions in predominantly chaparral fuels. This project will reduced the fire hazard by modifying the fire environment and giving fire protection agencies points of access to initiate defensive and offensive control strategies around the community.

The project is divided into the following components:

El Cariso Fuel break: Establish a 100' wide fuel break completely around El Cariso Village. A fuel break was originally constructed in 1990 on State Responsibility Lands north of Highway 74. This fuel break is being reconstructed with a new segment added south of Highway 74 in order to completely encircle the village. Cut material is being piled and burned or chipped on site. In June 2004, the El Cariso Fuel break was completed.

Decker Canyon Fuel break: Vegetation is planned to be thinned, pruned, and/or cleared within 50 feet of each side of the primary roads within Decker Canyon in order to improve access for fire equipment and escape routes for residents leaving the area. Cut material will be chipped and spread on site or piled and burned.

Cooperators in this project will include private landowners, the Cleveland National Forest, the Orange County Fire Authority and the Riverside Unit of CAL FIRE. This project is being planned; hopes are to see the projects be established by 2012. These projects will link a recently approved major fuel break system on the Cleveland National Forests, the North and South main divide truck trail/fuel break.

Lake Perris VMP

Lake Perris State Recreation Area is located in western Riverside County about 18 miles southeast of the city of Riverside. The project area is located at between 1600 and 1700 feet in elevation in the basin northeast of the lake. Lake Perris has approximately 2000 acres of habitat that is grassland. These grassland areas were highly disturbed in the past by grazing and agriculture and are currently dominated by non-native plants. The predominant plants are European annual grasses and mustards including Wild oats (*Avena* spp.), Bromes (*Bromus*

spp.) and mustards (*Brassica* spp.). Also present, but less dominant are annual forbs including filaree (*Erodium* spp.).

The project implements prescribed fire within the Lake Perris State Recreation Area for the purpose of habitat restoration. This is part of a long-term management plan to restore fire to the LPSRA at intervals that mimic the natural fire cycle as closely as possible.

The specific objective of this project is to create conditions favorable to the Stephens' kangaroo rat (SKR) and other native wildlife species by removing European annual grasses and mustard and promoting the growth of low growing annual forbs and selected native grasses. Complete consumption, > 90% is desired, with removal of the annual grasses and mustard as well as their seed and accumulated litter from the burn unit.

The current project area covers 500 acres divided into four (4) burn units. Two of the units covering 281 acres were burned in 2010. **In 2011 two additional units are planned to be burned for 250 acres. In 2012 one unit is planned for 142 acres. The State Park continues to approach CAL FIRE for additional burning opportunities within the park.

Southwest Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve VMP

The Southwest Riverside County Multi-species Reserve (SWRCMSR) incorporates approximately 15,000 acres in southwest Riverside County around Lake Skinner and north to the Diamond Valley Lake. The reserve is a composite of ownerships comprised of the Metropolitan Water District, Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District, and the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency. The reserve was established to enhance and protect endangered species habitat and protect the watersheds surrounding Lake Skinner and Diamond Valley Lake. A committee, comprised of a representative from each of the landowners as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, is responsible for management decisions on the reserve lands.

The final plan was completed in 2008 and initiated use of prescribed fire and other fuels management projects including broadcast burning and shaded fuel breaks networks throughout the reserve. In May/June 2010, 180 acres were burned contributing to a successful reintroduction of (SKR) Stephen Kangaroo Rats into those units. Much more is planned with possibilities of re-establishing native oak trees into areas farmed and stripped years ago. Fuels reduction throughout the project will afford protection to the surrounding communities of Sage, Hemet, Murrieta, and the Temecula Valley. **In May 2011, working with SWRCMSR and the San Diego Zoo, CAL FIRE burned pie shaped wedges to facilitate habitat experiments for the Stephen Kangaroo Rat. These experiments have been published, and show overwhelming evidence that burning creates the most suitable habitat for the endangered Stephens Kangaroo rat. Later that month, working under the VMP program CAL FIRE burned an additional 43 acres.

Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve VMP

The project involves prescribed burning on the Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve, which is located immediately west of Murrieta in the eastern foothills of the Santa Ana Mountain Range. A VMP plan was first developed for the Reserve in the mid-1980's and subsequent burn plans have been in place ever since. There are 402 acres covered under the current agreement.

Prescribed fire was introduced onto the reserve primarily to simulate natural fire cycles and characteristics that support native vegetation communities historically present in the area. The reserve is divided into numerous burn units that are randomly selected for burning each year. On average fire is returned to the same unit approximately every five to seven years, with between 100-200 acres being treated annually. In addition to the ecological benefits, these recurring cycles of fire generate plant communities with less dangerous wild fire behavior characteristics. They also develop vegetative age classes that will be less likely to create or sustain major wild fires.

Fuels are primarily annual grasses with oak woodland cover; however, chaparral is present in all or portions of several units. Project preparation work involves cutting of hand line and road maintenance to facilitate access and control lines. Burning is typically carried out using drip torches and aerial ignition devices. Management of the reserve has changed, and is now the responsibility of The California Department of Fish and Game, under the direction of a management committee. Ownership is comprised of The California Department of Fish and Game, The Nature Conservancy, the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District. The new agreement with the Department of Fish and Game took effect in May 2011.

The burning on this project has greatly increased the re-establishment of local native grasses and a very healthy habitat area.

Johnson Ranch VMP

The Johnson Ranch VMP is 671 acres east of Murrieta and South of Lake Skinner. The Ranch is managed by the Center for Natural Lands Management. The Ranch is owned by the California Department of Fish & Game, Riverside County Regional Parks & Open-Space, The City of Temecula, and The University of California, Riverside.

Fuels are primarily annual grasses and non-native weeds. One of the goals is to re-establish native plants on the reserve. In establishing the plants, it is hoped that the animal habitat will increase the wildlife. Burning is typically carried out by hand ignition devices. The Johnson Ranch VMP has just been re-newed and is effective till May 2015.

Orchard/Lake Mathews VMP

The Orchard/Lake Mathew VMP is 2,111 acres south of Lake Mathews in the Estelle Mountain Reserve. The reserve is owned and managed by Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency.

The fuels on the reserve are primarily grasses, but there are oaks and some coastal sage. The area of the VMP was used as orange and grape groves. The Conservation Agency is attempting to return the land to a native state. Broadcast burning is a tool that has helped eliminate non-native grasses and noxious weeds. In 2010 we burned 99 acres. Burning has been carried by hand firing control lines that are mowed with a scratch line included. Burning continued in 2011, CAL FIRE working with BLM and various local agencies completed 280 acres of prescribed burning. In 2012, land management concentrated our efforts to burning piles of discarded orange trees. The Stephens Kangaroo Rat population has exploded in area of prescribed burning, raptors are becoming present. This VMP expires in 2012; it is under review and should be valid this year.

Woodhouse VMP

The project is part of planned efforts to return and maintain native plant and animal habitat within the San Timoteo Reserve. In the 1800's the whole area of San Timoteo was used as a cattle grazing area, and a majority of the native plants were destroyed. In 1991 the County of Riverside started buying the land for a Stephens Kangaroo Rat reserve. Through the mitigation process the Regional Conservation Authority started buying parcels and established the county owned reserve. By introducing fire it is hoped to eradicate non-native grasses and weeds, specifically, the Yellow Star Thistle and restore native vegetation, providing animal habitat for the Stephens Kangaroo rat and the Burrowing Owl.

The reintroduction of prescribed fire will simulate the natural fire cycle and generate plant communities having less dangerous wildfire behavior characteristics. They will also develop vegetative age classes which will be less likely to create or sustain major wildfires.

LIST OF PROJECTS FOR 2012

- Santa Rosa Plateau VMP 137 acres, broadcast burning,
- Johnson Ranch VMP 204 acres, broadcast burning.
- Orchard/Lake Mathews 40 acres of piles
- San Jacinto State Park VMP 25 acres, pile burning, shaded fuel break, chipping.
- Lake Perris VMP 142 acres, broadcast burning.
- Oak Glen VMP 1600 acres, shaded fuel break, chipping, pile burning.
- Assist BLM, Lake Mathews, 85 acres Steel Peak 20 acres, Potreo 10 acres.
- Woodhouse VMP 129 acre Communication Tower VMP Project 200 acres, shaded fuel break, pile burning, chipping.

California Forest Practice Act – Exemptions and Emergency Notices

There are numerous Timber Harvest Plan (THP) exemptions and emergency notices in effect that are resulting in thousands of trees being removed with 100% slash cleanup in most cases. This activity will have an enormous impact on reducing the staggering amount of fuel that has resulted from the drought and bark beetle outbreak. CAL FIRE Foresters have been busy conducting Forest Practice inspections on the timber operations occurring on private land.

The governor's emergency proclamation temporarily lifted the requirement for filing exemptions and notices with the State. However, all other provisions of the Forest Practice Act and Rules are in affect. It is estimated that tens of thousands of trees have been removed off of SRA lands in the last year by Licensed Timber Operators and tree service contractors and that thousands more trees need to be removed.

Along power line rights of way CAL FIRE foresters are working closely with Southern California Edison (SCE)-hired foresters and line clearing crews to ensure compliance with the forest practice rules. We are also working with government crews that are removing trees along state highways and county roads for the same purpose.

As part of the VMP program and the San Jacinto Zone of Infestation authorized insect control program, CAL FIRE conservation camp crews are also removing thousands of trees in compliance with the forest practice rules.

Future Projects and Priority Rankings

Pinyon VMP

The Pinyon Project is a proposed project to protect the community of Spring Crest, near Pinyon. The proposed project involves construction of fuel breaks along the roads surrounding the community, and roads within the community. This will provide for resident and firefighter safety, ease of ingress and egress during a fire, and increasing the defensibility of the homes in the area.

The contributors to the project will be CAL FIRE/RVC, USFS, and Private Landowners.

Snow Creek VMP

The Snowcreek area consists of 39 homes located at the base of the Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountain National Monument, which is now surrounded by federal/state land. This project has recently come to the Unit's attention. Staff is currently working with residents of the Snow Creek area, and other agencies; primarily BLM; in order to assist this rural community. The Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council has been in contact with the spokesperson for the area, and discussions are underway to bring them in as a chapter of the MCFSC.

The homeowners in the area have developed the following goals:

- Create wildfire protection zones that reduce the risk to citizens and fire crews.
- To access all wildlands, not just state responsibility. Analysis will identify fed/state/local government & private properties. Identify high-risk areas.
- Identify key policy issues, recommendations to reduce total cost & losses by increasing fire protection system effectiveness.
- Strong fiscal policy focus.
- Translate to public.

Assets of Snowcreek Village:

- Citizens lives
- Structures (homes and buildings)
- Historical (1900's)
- Indian Pictographs/Indian caves
- Human Burial Grounds (1918 grave marker)
- Desert Water Agency (east canyon)
- University of California Wildlife study area (west canyon)
- National Monument
- Pacific Crest Trail (passes thru Village)
- Community of Idyllwild
- Palm Springs Tram
- Major development due east (Highway 111)
- Endangered and non-endangered wildlife (owls, hawks, tortoise, big horn sheep, desert life)
- Vegetation (Milk Vetch endangered)
- Scenic
- Tourism/Commerce
- Electric power lines hillsides and canyons
- Bird watchers, artistry, recreation, etc.
- Transportation
- Air & water quality

Stakeholders

- Homeowners
- Private land owners
- BLM National Monument
- State of California Department of Parks & Recreation, Fish & Game
- Desert Water Agency
- SCE
- University of California
- Resource Conservation
- USDI Fish & Wildlife
- County Fire Department
- Transportation land management agency
- Cities: Palm Springs, Cabazon, Idyllwild
- Habitat
- Conservation groups
- Historical societies
- Tourism
- Commerce

Planned projects for 2012

- Simpson Park VMP 300 acres, thinning, broadcast burning.
- El Cariso/Decker Canyon VMP 800 acres, shaded fuel break, pile burning, broadcast burning.
- Rancho Capistrano VMP 100 acres, shaded fuel break, pile burning, chipping.

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Grants

Significant Forest Health Enhancement Program and Hazardous Fuels Treatment grant funds have come to CAL FIRE in Southern California from the USFS. These funds have been used to augment our traditional programs, including VMP and CFIP by providing additional staff for

planning projects and helping to cover operational costs. Additionally, Riverside County has received grants for increasing forest health, creating jobs, promoting biomass utilization, and reducing fire risk

FHEP

The Forest Health Enhancement Program grants began in August 2003, and ran through December 2009. This grant was awarded to three CAL FIRE southern units (RRU, MVU, and BDU). In Riverside, project funding was limited geographically to the forested areas in the San Jacinto Mountain range. 46 projects of various scales and objectives were completed including: 465 acres of tree planting, 182 acres of mastication, and 545 acres of fuel reduction/forest health improvement projects using CAL FIRE crews or contractors. Projects not completed by the expiration of the grant were rolled into the Hazardous Fuels Treatment Grants I and II that began July 2008.

HFT

Hazardous Fuels Treatment and Supplemental Hazardous Fuels Treatment grants were awarded to many units throughout the state. Riverside Unit has used these grants to hire resource management staff and fund CAL FIRE crews to complete FHEP projects and other vegetation management projects for the purpose of reducing hazardous fuels. A list of high priority projects are in **appendix B**.

County Grants

Various grants have been awarded to Riverside County Fire. The funds have been used to augment biomass utilization, continue the Dead Tree and Slash Removal programs, expand an existing CWPP, collaborate with and support Fire Safe councils, and plan and implement various fuel reduction/forest health projects including fuelbreak implementation and maintenance.