

Collaboration

Mountain Area Safety Task Force (MAST)

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), in cooperation with all of the agencies and individuals in the Riverside County MAST, have teamed up to mitigate an unprecedented emergency facing the forested mountain communities. Four years of severe drought combined with drastically overstocked tree stands have resulted in tremendous rates of tree mortality due to bark beetles in and around the community. In March 2002, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors declared a local emergency. In March 2003, Governor Davis concurred with the County and issued his own State of Emergency Proclamation. The governor has made a request to President Bush for a federal declaration.

The MAST was formed to mitigate the threat to life, property, watershed and the ecosystem. It is currently Riverside Unit's single greatest threat to SRA, (even though it is within federal DPA) and is the number one priority of the Riverside Unit. This is not only for the protection of life, property and resources, but to protect the lives of CDF and other agency firefighters and law enforcement personnel that may be called to fight a fire or conduct large-scale evacuations in communities within the San Jacinto Mountains.

In addition to CDF, the MAST consists of members from many agencies, groups and elected officials: Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council; U.S. Forest Service; Riverside County Fire Department; Natural Resource Conservation Service; Idyllwild Fire Protection District; Riverside County Board of Supervisors; Riverside County Office of Emergency Services; State OES; Riverside County Flood Control; Southern California Edison; Senator Feinstein; Congresswoman Bono; Senator Battin; Assemblyman Benoit; California Department of Fish and Game; California Department of Transportation; Riverside County Transportation Land Management Agency; South Coast Air Quality Management District; Pine Cove/Idyllwild/Fern Valley/Lake Hemet Water Districts; Riverside County Waste Management; Pine Cove Property Owners Association; UC Co-op Extension Service; Riverside County Sheriffs Office; California Highway Patrol. The MAST is organized using the Incident Command System (ICS) with a unified command; formal Incident Action Plans (IAPs) are produced and followed by the MAST members.

The MAST ICs have set the following incident objectives:

- Provide for Public and Employee Safety
- Clear transportation and utility corridors of dead trees
- Protect Communications Systems
- Protect the community from catastrophic fire and tree falling hazards
- Develop and implement the following plans:
 - Immediate – Evacuation, structure contingency, transportation and utility corridors, communication sites, damage assessment and dead tree removal.
 - Mid-term – Transition to long-term community protection, regeneration and forest health.
 - Long-term - Strategic actions leading to continued forest health and community safety
- Provide for coordinated Public Relations Program with the public, elected officials and within agencies
- Provide for coordinated agency responses
- Maintain emergency response capability including structure protection contingency
- Prioritize and maintain transportation and utility corridors and communication sites
- Prioritize community protection through Defensible Fuel Profile Zones, hazard tree abatement, fuelbreaks and fire law/code enforcement
- Provide for removal of trees and slash through solid waste management and development of private sector utilization and markets
- Provide cost/benefit analysis of actions based upon objectives
- Identify and develop financial aid opportunities through grants and incentives.

Specific MAST Division Assignments for CDF Personnel

- Remove dead/dying trees that threaten to block vital evacuation corridors using conservation camp crews working in partnership with CalTrans and county road department. Assignment is ongoing daily
- Develop a structure protection pre-plan for all mountain communities. Assignment was completed August 8, 2003 for Pine Cove, Idyllwild, Mountain Center
- Identify and construct safety zones for use by firefighting/law enforcement resources, which can be also used as a “shelter in place” option for members of the public, should there not be sufficient time to evacuate. To date six safety zones have been identified and completed. The safety zones are – Tahquitz Pines, Idyllwild Pines, Buckhorn Camp, AstroCamp, International School Of Music and the Arts (ISOMATA), and the Idyllwild Transfer Station.
- Assist private property owners with identifying dead/dying trees that must be removed due to fire and falling hazards – work with FEMA, OES, the County

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and other agencies to help secure funding to assist property owners with the extreme and unexpected costs of removing trees around their structures. As of May 1, 2005, over \$28,254,000 has been obtained for the County of Riverside, through FEMA, USFS, NRCS and other federal grants to assist with dead tree removal and fuels treatment on private SRA lands.

- Create Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZ) around the communities on both public and private lands in order to have sufficient defensible space to keep a wildfire from entering or leaving the community – accelerate work on Red Hill VMP shaded fuelbreak and add additional land under contract – Initiate work on the Baldy Mountain VMP project to protect the communities of Mountain Center and Baldy Mountain Village. Augmentation camp crews are working on DFPZs
- Assist the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council in securing grants for fuel reduction projects in the communities – provide technical assistance on setting up and administering projects. This is an on-going project.
- Develop a community evacuation plan in cooperation with the other fire and law enforcement agencies. Project was completed primarily by CDF personnel August 8, 2003
- Work with utility companies to ensure dead/dying trees are felled and removed that threaten to fall on lines and start fires or interrupt service. Identify communication sites that need tree removal in order for them to be protected and available in the event of fire or other type incident. SCE has completed their first and second passes through the San Jacinto Mountains and surrounding communities. SCE is currently working on “maintenance” type removals, removing new mortality as it is located.
- Enforce the Public Resources Code and other applicable fire codes/ordinances on all properties within the community to reduce fuel loading. Develop educational materials to assist the property owners in knowing what exactly is required. Pre-Fire Staff have been hosting various meetings with agencies and the public to ensure equal enforcement and education in the communities. Station personnel are gearing up to begin LE-38 inspections in their areas, with additional follow-up by Fire Prevention staff to issue citations as appropriate.
- Develop a reforestation and forest health management plan that will keep fuels at acceptable levels and ensure forest health. Through Forest Health Grants, two Forestry Assistant II's and an office tech have been hired to begin working on forest rehabilitation and forest health issues.
- Develop a comprehensive strategy for disposing of the enormous amount of fuels being generated by the felling of dead/dying trees. CDF personnel, working in cooperation with Riverside County Waste Management and the USFS have set up a tub grinding operation capable of grinding up to 40” diameter logs and all the associated slash into wood chips. The wood chips are going to a wood-burning electrical generation plant and/or to a company that produces mulch for the public market.
- Work with the USFS, University of California and other agencies to develop markets to take advantage of the massive volume of logs and biomass that

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are resulting from the tree die-off and subsequent removal. A \$2,000,000 grant has been received to promote wood utilization in the San Jacinto Mountains.

- Work with other MAST agencies and Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) to develop a shared GIS database for use by all MAST agencies in conjunction with public access of select portions of that GIS along with other educational information on the emergency via a public website, www.calmast.org. The initial database and website are complete as of August 28, 2003. Numerous upgrades and additions will be constantly occurring.

This Incident Action Plan for this emergency is constantly evolving. It is estimated that it will take at least 5 years of a constant massive effort to remove the vast amount of hazardous fuels currently existing in the San Jacinto Mountains.

MAST Accomplishments as of December 2004

- All 6,477 parcels received some level of survey for dead trees
- County Contracts resulted in removal of 3,905 trees on 779 parcels
- County Contracts resulted in removal of 1,509 trees on the six Safety Zones
- SCE removed 18,100 trees
- NRCS removed 3,779 trees with five contracts
- Total of approximately 27,293 trees removed
- Fire Safe Council completed hazard abatement on 200 private parcels
- 3,850 hours spent by 32 visiting Foresters assisting RRU/RVC during this emergency
- Evacuation Table Top Exercise Conducted June 24, 2004
- I-Zone Drill scheduled for June 15, 2005 – Will include all the agencies affiliated with MAST working in the field.

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Government Stakeholders

An integrated, intergovernmental approach is used to assess all wildlands. Federal, state and local wildland fire and resource protection agency partners in planning are:

- United States Department of Agriculture
 - Forest Service
 - San Bernardino National Forest, San Jacinto Ranger District
 - Cleveland National Forest
 - Natural Resource Conservation Service

- United States Department of Interior
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - Fish and Wildlife Service

- State of California
 - Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
 - Department of Fish and Game
 - Department of Parks and Recreation
 - Department of Transportation

- Riverside County
 - Riverside County Fire Department
 - Transportation and Land Management Agency
 - Riverside County Parks and Recreation

- The Following Cities:
 - Banning
 - Beaumont
 - Calimesa
 - Canyon Lake
 - Corona
 - Desert Hot Springs
 - Hemet
 - Lake Elsinore
 - La Quinta
 - Moreno Valley
 - Murrieta
 - Norco
 - Palm Springs
 - Palm Desert
 - Perris
 - Riverside
 - San Jacinto
 - Temecula

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Private and Quasi-Public Stakeholders

- ❑ Private individuals / property owners.
- ❑ Ranchers and farmers utilizing open lands.
- ❑ Corporate entities holding lands or conducting business in areas at risk.
- ❑ Home and property owners associations.
- ❑ Real Estate and Business Associations.
- ❑ Coordinated Resource Management Planning Committees (CRMP).
- ❑ Firesafe Councils and Alliances.
- ❑ Water companies relying on watershed areas.
- ❑ Electric companies concerned with power generation and distribution.
- ❑ Railroads and other transportation entities traversing wildlands.
- ❑ Communication companies with facilities sited on or traversing wildlands.
- ❑ Agricultural commissions, boards, committees and associations.
- ❑ Habitat conservation groups.
- ❑ Groups and associations promoting various outdoor activities.
- ❑ Historical societies.
- ❑ Tourism and commerce promoting groups.
- ❑ Petroleum/Natural Gas pipeline companies