

## **Vegetation Management Program Projects**

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### **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 are assisting several ecological reserves with the development of fire management plans that will involve fuels management as a component. Prescribed burning through the VMP Program will most likely be utilized for fire hazard reduction and ecological restoration on these properties when the plans are complete. 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 other 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 the BLM

## ***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, Riversidian 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 CDF 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.

### **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

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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 618 acres divided into three (3) burn units. Two of the units, covering 454 acres, were burned in the spring of 1999. The remaining 133 acres were burned in 2001. The State Park continues to approach CDF for additional burning opportunities within the park.

### **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 fuelbreak 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.

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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.

### **Ronald McDonald House CFIP**

The project is located in the north end of Garner Valley; Section 4, Township 6 south, Range 3 east, San Bernardino Base Meridian, Idyllwild quad. Pre-commercial thinning and pruning of 5 acres. Brush competing with the conifer stand will also be removed or thinned. The project is designed to reduce competition for water, nutrients and light concentrating biomass production on remaining trees and creating a healthier more vigorous forest. The project will also reduce fuel loading and reduce ladder fuels creating a more fire safe forest and wildland urban interface. In addition, a forest management plan has been prepared which the landowner may use now and in the future years to guide them in sound forest and land management practices which include fire safe considerations for both natural resources and developed portions of the land.

As of August 2003, a majority of the work has been completed. In addition to the initially targeted vegetation removal, dead trees resulting from the drought and bark beetles have also been removed. This has resulted in a property that has had its fuels sufficiently treated so that this camp has been identified as a "shelter in place" facility where members of the public or other camps can come to survive the passage of a fire if they are unable to evacuate off the mountain.

## ***Current Projects***

### **El Cariso and Decker Canyon Fuelbreaks**

The project involves the improvement of a fuelbreak 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 has 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 Fuelbreak:** Establish a 100' wide fuelbreak completely around El Cariso Village. A fuelbreak was originally constructed in 1990 on State Responsibility Lands north of Highway 74. This fuelbreak 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 Fuelbreak was completed.

**Decker Canyon Fuelbreak:** Vegetation is scheduled 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 include 19 private landowners, the Cleveland National Forest, the Orange County Fire Authority and the Riverside Unit of CDF. This project is still pending, with discussion among local VMP coordinators regarding the use of goats on the projects.

### **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

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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 fuelbreaks, 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.

### **Poppet Flats Fuelbreak**

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

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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.

The intent of this proposed project is to implement a two-phase project that will provide a fuelbreak and truck trail completely around the Poppet Flats area. Phase one, completed July 2003 involved the construction of the fuelbreak and truck trail on private, National Forest, and BLM lands east of Poppet Flats Road. Phase two of the project will complete the construction of the fuelbreak north and west of the community.

The truck trail will be re-constructed to allow access for Type-3 engines and vegetation will be cleared to create a fuelbreak with an average width of 100 feet. Actual width will vary in order to create a feathered, mosaic appearance.

All cut material will be piled and burned or chipped. Vegetation Management Program (VMP) agreements have been 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 be established to facilitate the disposal of green waste generated by the property owners' annual weed/brush abatement activities. Chipping will be accomplished by CDF fire crews using a State-owned chipper housed at Oak Glen Conservation Camp.

Local residents within the community are very supportive of the proposed project. 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.

As of August 2003, Phase I on the east side of Poppet Flats is complete. On July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003, a 4,400-acre fire burned up to the east side of Poppet Flats. Firefighters were successful in keeping the fire out of Poppet Flats and the Silent Valley Club.

Phase II on the North and West side of the community is 2/3's complete, as of June 2004. Staff is currently working on property agreements on the remaining 1/3 of the project, with an expected Phase II completion by Spring 2005. The major issue regarding the completion of the Poppet Flats fuelbreak is obtaining signed RM-75's from various derelict properties. VMP staff is currently working with the Riverside County Assessors office to obtain the most recent APN information in an effort to complete the project.

### **Red Hill Fuelbreak**

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 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.

In 1991, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) entered into a Vegetation Management Program (VMP) Agreement with 34 private property owners on the western border of Pine Cove. The intent of the project was to reduce the fuel loading along the western perimeter of the community and to provide a "shaded fuelbreak" to protect the community from a potentially devastating slope driven wildland fire from the west. The CDF completed the project as defined in the 1991 Agreements in November 1997.

The Riverside Unit has re-entered into agreements with the current private property owners whose properties lie within the 1991 Red Hill Vegetation Management Program. In addition to maintaining the prescribed fuel loading levels completed during the 1991-1997 Program, it is proposed that CDF increases the treatment area within the same private properties to broaden the "shaded fuelbreak" 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. The net treatment area is approximately 251 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

The proposed project has the potential of reducing the damages from wildland fires spreading into the community of Pine Cove. Fire history records indicate that fires in the surrounding area are traditionally slope and wind driven, burning in an easterly

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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 community of Pine Cove 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 fuelbreak 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, CDF is reentering the same project area on multiple occasions, as more trees die and future treatment will be required for several years to come. The current VMP contract has been renewed and expires in October 2006. Insect control crews from Bautista and Oak Glen camp as well as regular grade crews are working on this massive fuel reduction project. CDF special augmentation engines are assisting with the project also, which keeps additional firefighting resources in close proximity to the potential disaster that could occur in the area.

### **Southwest Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve/Johnson Ranch**

The Southwest Riverside County Multi-species Reserve 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.

A draft fire management plan was initiated in August 1997 by the Metropolitan Water District in cooperation with the Reserve Management Committee and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The final plan was completed in 2003 and will result in the initiation of prescribed fire and other fuels management projects.

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During 2004 approximately 550 acres were burned, with approximately 600 acres scheduled to be treated in 2005.

### **The Santa Margarita River Management Area**

The Santa Margarita River Management Area (SMRMA) is a joint project of the Fallbrook Public Utility District, Mission Resource Conservation District and San Diego State University. It is funded through grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and CDF. It consists of two properties, the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve (SMER) and the Fallbrook Public Utility District (FPUD). The SMER property is a Biological Field Station for SDSU and the FPUD property was acquired for a dam that was never built. See attached Reserve management area map.

SMRMA covers approximately 5,480 acres of land straddling the Riverside / San Diego County Line west of Interstate 15. It follows the Santa Margarita River Drainage south of Temecula. More than three-quarters of the area lies within Riverside County. The topography is largely steep hilly terrain bisected by a deep river gorge. It is mostly covered by various types of chaparral, coastal sage scrub, oak woodland forest and cottonwood-willow riparian areas. Although located in very high fire hazard area, most of the property has not burned for more than 25 years. The entire SMRMA area is habitat for a number of rare and endangered plant and animal species. It is surrounded by rural residential and light agricultural use property. Most of the agriculture consists of avocado and citrus groves.

The area is mostly CDF Direct Protection Area and CDF has been working in an advisory capacity with SDSU in the preparation of a Pre-Fire Management Plan. A draft plan has been developed which will incorporate the elements of ignition risk reduction, infrastructure improvements, fire defense improvements, vegetation management through prescribed burning and a pre-fire suppression plan. Elements of each are described below.

#### *Ignition risk reduction:*

- ❑ Additional gates, fencing and sign posting.
- ❑ Increased patrol by the U.S. Border Patrol and Sheriff's Deputies to reduce trespass.
- ❑ A Neighborhood Watch Program in adjacent residential properties.
- ❑ Smoking and fire suppression equipment restrictions on persons and vehicles entering SMRMA on official business.

#### *Infrastructure Improvements:*

- ❑ Re-grading and improving roads and trails within and accessing SMRMA.
- ❑ Road signage as appropriate.
- ❑ Fire Safety Zone / Staging areas for fire suppression personnel and equipment.

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### *Fire defense Improvements:*

- ❑ Creation of a fuelbreak along the California Aqueduct Road at least 100' in width. This fuelbreak will bisect SMRMA along a north-south axis.
- ❑ Real-time access to weather information from an on-site station.

### *Vegetation Management:*

- ❑ Prescribed burning in the chaparral fuels to create an age-class mosaic that reduces fuels and enhances habitat.

### *Pre-Fire Suppression Plan:*

- ❑ Develop a plan by mutual agreement for distribution to fire suppression agencies having jurisdiction that addresses fire suppression tactical necessities while minimizing the impacts of those activities upon the environment.

Status: Project is still in planning stages. A draft Wild Fire Management Plan has been prepared by SDSU for review. Some of the ignition risk reduction measures that do not involve ground disturbance have been implemented.

### **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 4,230 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 500 and 1500 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.

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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 February 2004.

In June of 2003, 558 acres of this project were successfully burned and as of June 2004, a total of 1,130 acres have been burned.

### **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. CDF 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 CDF 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, CDF conservation camp crews are also removing thousands of trees in compliance with the forest practice rules.

### ***Future Projects and Priority Rankings***

#### **Fleming Ranch**

The Fleming Ranch VMP is a proposed cooperative project with the San Bernardino National Forest in the San Jacinto Mountains north of Garner Valley. The Forest Service has previously used prescribed fire in this area and CDF is currently working with the owner of the Fleming Ranch to expand fuels treatment onto SRA lands. Although in the early planning stages, this project will greatly enhance the other fire hazard reduction efforts occurring within the mountain communities. Overall, 1,300 acres are proposed to be treated.

#### **Pinyon VMP**

The Pinyon Project is a proposed project to protect the community of Spring Crest, near Pinyon. The proposed project involves construction of fuelbreaks 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 CDF/RVC, USFS, and Private Landowners.

#### **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 fuelbreaks 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 lessen catastrophic fire and its threat to public and firefighter safety and damage to property.

Unit staff are currently planning, completing environmental documentation, making site inspections, and developing a site-specific project work plan for each treatment site. Local CDF crews and equipment will be 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.

## **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)
- Idyllwild Community (The Verbenia Fire stopped just short of the scout camp last year)
- 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 (2004 diverted air flight to Palm Springs International Airport)
- Air & water quality

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### 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

Through the BLM this area could be a defensible fuel profile zone. More cleared (reduced) would be better to protect lives of residents and protect fire crews.

As an update, on Saturday 5/21/05 starting at 0730 hours, BLM and 12 residents of the Snow Creek Village met and started removal of dead mustard vegetation on the west side of Snow Creek Road. The residents and volunteers worked till around noon and completed about 25% of the area that is to be treated. BLM supplied a large roll off dumpster to put the vegetation into, the dumpster will remain on site for eight days giving the residents and volunteers time to complete the project.