



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARK AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED:

REPORT NO. 201

ATTENTION:

Park & Recreation Board
Agenda of January 21, 2010

SUBJECT:

Update on Brush Management

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATIONAL ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE BOARD.

BACKGROUND

There are a number of wildland/urban interface areas within the City of San Diego. These areas are considered a high hazard fire environment because they possess all the ingredients necessary to support large, intense, and uncontrollable wildfires. Within this hazardous environment, there are individual houses, subdivisions, and entire communities. Many homes, however, would be unable to survive an intense wildfire. Since it is not a question of "if" wildfires will occur but "when" they will occur, the likelihood of human life and property loss is great and growing. The ability to live more safely in this fire environment greatly depends upon the use of "pre-fire activities". Pre-fire activities are actions taken before a wildfire occurs which improve the survivability of people and homes. They include, in part, proper vegetation management around the home. This vegetation management contributes to what is known as "defensible space".

The term defensible space was coined to describe vegetation management and other practices aimed at reducing the wildfire threat to homes. Many people do not view the plants growing on their property as a threat. But in terms of wildfire, the vegetation adjacent to their homes can have considerable influence upon the survivability of their homes. All vegetation, including plants native to the area as well as ornamental plants, is potential wildfire fuel. If vegetation is properly modified and maintained, a wildfire can be slowed, the length of flames shortened, and the amount of heat reduced, all of which assist firefighters in defending the home against an oncoming wildfire.

San Diego Municipal Code Section 142.0412 requires brush management within 100 feet of structures where native or naturalized vegetation exist within this distance. The regulations refer

to two “zones” within the 100 feet, Zone 1 and Zone 2. Zone 1 is a typical a back yard, generally 35 feet and often located on private property. This area may be landscaped with irrigated ornamental vegetation. Zone 2 extends out from Zone 1 generally 65 feet so that the total width of Zone 1 plus Zone 2 is 100 feet. The Zone 2 area would include native/naturalized vegetation able to survive without supplemental irrigation. Municipal Code Section 142.0412(l) makes the property owner responsible for conducting brush management on the owner’s own property.

There are primarily three City Departments responsible for brush management: Fire-Rescue, Park and Recreation and Development Services. Each has a separate, clear and distinct role relative to brush management. The Fire-Rescue Department enforces the City’s brush management regulations on private property. The Park and Recreation Department manages and conducts brush management on its open space properties, primarily in areas adjacent to private ownership (other divisions within Park and Recreation, the Water Department, the General Services/Streets Division, and the Real Estate Assets Department also conduct brush management on lands they manage). The Development Services Department effects codification of brush management policy, assists with code interpretations, and requires brush management for new development.

In FY 2008, the Fire-Rescue Department was funded to implement a proactive brush management program as a result of the devastating 2007 Wildfires. Prior to that action, the Department responded to citizen complaints only. The proactive program is designed to enforce the City’s brush management regulations on private property within the wildland/urban interface and to educate homeowners on how they can make their homes defensible. The goal of the program is to create defensible space throughout the City.

Fire-Rescue’s proactive brush management program was developed and implemented in January 2008. There are a total of 42,818 private parcels in the proactive program. These parcels have been prioritized and an inspection schedule developed based on the severity of hazard they represent. Based on current staffing levels, the Department projects it can inspect 36% (15,415 parcels) of the total number of parcels annually. To date 25,525 proactive inspections have been conducted. The Department has also responded to 1,968 complaints of brush management violations. In addition to conducting inspections, a number of other brush management efforts have been completed or are underway as follows:

- A prioritized map of the City’s open space lands was developed and provided to the Park and Recreation Department for brush thinning areas based on fire risk.
- The Department revised its Brush Management Bulletin and developed new Wildfire Zone cards. These cards provide comprehensive information regarding defensible space, fire resistive construction, accessibility requirements, outdoor structures and storage, planning and evacuation for pets and livestock and personal preparedness. This information was distributed to 10,000 homeowners living in the wildland/urban interface.
- A comprehensive brush management policy was developed in conjunction with Development Services and Park & Recreation and designed to provide clarification of the City’s brush management regulations for the public and City employees.
- A Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map was developed in accordance with State Law. This state law also required local agencies to make the draft map available for public review and to adopt by ordinance. The draft map was made available for a 60 day review period

which expired on May 27, 2009. The map was presented to and approved by City Council and went into in effect on August 27, 2009.

As the owner of 1,180 acres of open space land at the urban/wildland interface, the Park and Recreation Department’s Open Space Division (Division) is responsible for brush management in many areas throughout the City. Prior to FY 2008, funding was allocated to fund the thinning of only 70 acres of vegetation per year, primarily in response to complaints. Program funding has increased significantly since that time as follows:

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Acres Actually Completed</u>
2008	\$1,036,412	210 acres	266 acres
2009	\$3,124,615	590 acres*	530 acres (90% of goal)
2010	\$3,209,946	590 acres*	219 acres (as of December 2)

*This goal is consistent with the Fire-Rescue Department recommendation to conduct brush management biannually. Beginning on November 19, 1989, subdivision map approvals have required private developers to keep Zone 2 within private ownership; therefore the inventory of City land requiring brush management is not growing.

The Division also issues Right of Entry permits to homeowners and contractors to conduct brush management on City lands where requested; assistance and oversight is provided by staff to permittees to ensure that brush management is conducted in accordance with the Municipal Code.

As noted above, in 2008 the Fire-Rescue Department provided the Park and Recreation Department with a prioritized list of 17 areas for brush management within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. Division progress subsequent to receiving the map is as follows:

Completed:	Priority Area 1, Maple Canyon	Priority Area 2, Switzer Canyon
	Priority Area 3, Tecolote Canyon	Priority Area 7, Mission Valley
In Progress:	Priority Area 4, Scripps Ranch	Priority Area 5, Tierrasanta
	Priority Area 6, Marian Bear Park	Priority Area 8, Del Cerro
	Priority Area 9, Sabre Springs	Priority Area 10, Los Penasquitos
	Priority 11, Serra Mesa	Priority Area 12, Carmel Valley

Current information about the division’s brush management efforts can be viewed at: <http://www.sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/parks/brush.shtml>.

This fiscal year, due to the increased funding, the Division has continued its expanded non-profit contracts, increased City staffing (including a biologist to oversee the program), and contracts with for-profit environmental and landscaping firms to conduct brush management within the existing Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant areas. The FEMA grant provided funding in early 2008 and is used in specific high severity fire areas. This grant will expire in December, 2010. An application for an additional \$1 million in FEMA grant funding has been submitted. Representative Bilbray earmarked this funding for the City of San Diego and this funding is expected to be awarded and available in FY 2011.

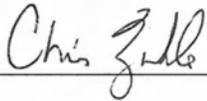
FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS: None with this action

PREVIOUS COUNCIL and/or COMMITTEE ACTION: None

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS: Park and Recreation staff works with stakeholders via the Open Space Canyons Advisory Committee. In addition, Development Services and Fire-Rescue have brush management outreach programs.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND PROJECTED IMPACTS: Proper implementation of the brush management regulations will reduce wildfire risk for those living near the wildland/urban interface and will minimize environmental impacts to wildlife values.

Respectfully submitted,



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CZ

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