



BANNER MOUNTAIN HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

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FEATURES IN THIS ISSUE: FIRE FEAR; HOUSING VALUE; WE WIN WELLS; DEER CREEK [PART] PARK 2

Fire Fear: Cut the Hype, Take a Balanced Approach

Dense and flammable vegetation does need to be removed from the area immediately around a home (about 10 ft.) to reduce the risk of building ignition during a wildfire. But how can this be done without causing additional problems? We are being told to eliminate flammable materials (fire-prone vegetation, wood stacks, wood decking, patio furniture, umbrellas, brooms, etc.) from within 30 feet of our homes. And if you are considered near wildland open space, remove dead wood from plants and ground, thin and trim trees and shrubs (lower limbs removed), and prevent the growth of weedy grasses for an additional 70 feet for a total of 100 ft., BUT maintain a modified canopy of vegetation to shade the ground to reduce weed growth.

Clearing not the answer. Unfortunately the term "clearance" is used in California state law when referring to this 100 foot zone, leading some people to think all vegetation must be removed down to bare soil. This is why other California municipalities have replaced the word "clearance" with "thinning" when referring to vegetation management around homes. Officials in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) are continually

trying to help citizens understand that clearance doesn't mean the removal of all native plants. Bare soil clearance not only is ugly, hot, oxygen depriving, and increases erosion, but will lead to the growth of weeds in the now disturbed soil. These weeds are



considered "flashy fuels" which actually *increase* fire risk because they ignite so easily.

While some may think the "best" way to reduce fire risk is by striping down to bare ground wide areas around your house and replacing part of it with lawn or ground cover, the important question to ask is "**considering the total costs, is this the most effective way to protect my house?**" The answer is No. It may be the easiest approach politically, but by no means does it guarantee your safety.

Clearing does not stop fire spreading!

Embers spread fires. The primary mechanism for homes igniting during a wildfire is glowing embers. Embers can travel a mile or more from the fire front. This is why wildfires jump ten-lane Interstate Highways and over large lakes. The reason some homes in the Tahoe fire did not burn down could have been due to the presence of firefighters, shift in the direction or speed of the wind, fire resistant construction, time of day the fire reached the property (evening weather typically moderates fires), or just luck.

Surviving is more important. The concept of "defensible space" by itself is not an adequate solution in Nevada County. It presumes wildfires are small and firefighting resources will always be available. The most damaging wildfires are typically large events that tax firefighting agencies. Chances are there may not be a firefighter available to use the defensible space. It is best to create a "survivable space" in which **the home can survive on its own. This means fire-safety needs to focus on fire-resistant construction as well as proper vegetation management.**

Stripping is wrong. Striping the land of native vegetation as many contractors want to do leads to erosion and the growth of invasive weeds. Weeds demand continual maintenance to control.

Living things are better. Lightly irrigated, properly thinned and spaced shrubs can act as a "green" fire barrier, absorbing heat and deflecting oncoming embers. Bare, open space cannot do this.

Plants are not the enemy. There are a number of reasons one decides to live next to a natural environment; peacefulness, enjoyment of wildlife, uncluttered vistas, native wildflowers, and we just like it that way. While surrounding one's self with lawns

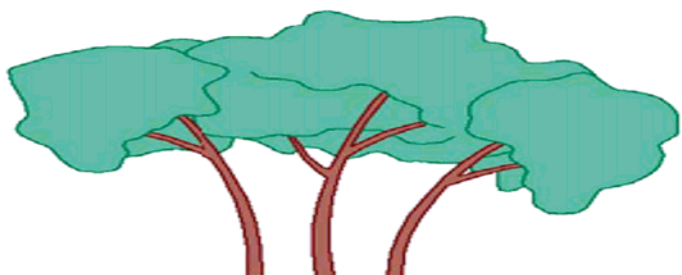
and other non-native additions may appeal to some, it is generally not supportive of housing values. Although an easy target, native vegetation is not the enemy. We are next to it because of it.

Protect against embers too. Therefore, it makes sense to make your home one that is adapted to the environment in which it exists. The first place to start when trying to protect your home from wildfire is **from the structure out, not from the wildland in** which includes:

1. Proper attic vent construction (to keep out embers), non-combustible roofing (to resist embers), enclosed eaves (to defend against embers), and the removal of flammable objects such as wood fences, patio furniture, wood decking, etc. (to prevent ignition by embers).

2. Making sure the first 30 feet around the home is free of flammable materials and is landscaped with fire resistant vegetation (http://www.edcfiresafe.org/fire_safe_vegetation.htm#nativeTrees) is the next step. Pines, firs, cedars, oaks and manzanita should be thinned and branches removed up to 8 ft. from the ground.

3. The next 70 feet **should not be cleared** leaving mostly bare ground as some are telling us. Selectively thin the native vegetation, remove all the dead wood, de-ladder, maintain a loose canopy, **without disturbing** the soil. Only trees up to 8 in. in diameter (at chest height) should be thinned. Thinning depends on



20 ft. the tree canopy, slope and distance above the smaller trees to a canopy (usually 2.5 times the height of the tree to the canopy). See <http://www.firesafecouncil.org/education/attachments/Homeownerchecklist.pdf>

Once these three basic steps are accomplished, only minimal yearly maintenance needs be done and the beauty of Banner Mt. is preserved.

Let's learn from others. There are surprising results from a recent study of the July 2006 Sawtooth desert fire that burned more than 50 homes in and around Pioneertown, a small community west of Yucca Valley and northwest of Palm Springs. Numerous homes with 100 feet+ of bare dirt clearance burned to the ground. Observation of the homes that burned points to the condition of the vegetation around the structure. **In many cases, the only portion of the shrubs and trees that showed fire damage were the sides facing the home. It was the burning structure that ignited the vegetation, not the other way around. This is true of the Angora fire (Tahoe) as well based on photos.**

No Turning Back...

Once native vegetation is cleared and the soil is disturbed the homeowner is permanently shackled with a number of negative consequences:

1. Continual maintenance costs
2. The introduction and growth of invasive weeds
3. Increased soil erosion and the formation of gullies
4. Surrounding aesthetics seriously damaged
5. Natural habitat destroyed
6. Reduction of native animal life
7. Potential legal costs if "clearance" is done improperly or on public/private land without proper authorization
8. Failure to account for future changes in vegetation management laws
9. Failure to account for personal tastes -- Do you think you or your buyers will want your home surrounded by dirt and weeds?
10. False sense of security that "clearance" will prevent your home from burning.

The important point to understand about fire behavior and why some homes burn while other do not is that there are *multiple causes*. **"How do I prevent my home from burning?" is NOT a one answer question.** While vegetation management will reduce the risk of home ignition, depending on it alone to protect your home in a firestorm is wishful thinking at best. The other thing to appreciate is that no matter what you do, nothing will guarantee

that your home will remain standing after a California wildfire. If you live in California's fire-prone environment, all you can do is take steps to reduce risk.

(Thanks to Richard W. Halsey (University of California) and <http://www.californiachaparral.com/> for this expert insight and research.)

For the full version of the County Fire Plan, or more information, go to the FONA website: <http://www.fona-nevco.org>

What's Your Home Worth NOW?

(Coming, a city near you)

Applications to build more houses in Western Nevada County continue to increase despite the fact that everyone we talked to, *The Union* & national papers are saying that the housing market is dangerously slow!

Nationally, July existing home sales declined 3.85% (the 5th straight month of decline) & new home sales declined 6.6%, and are off 22.3% from a year earlier (chart on p. 9).

So what do the developers know that local home sellers & real estate agents don't know?

Here in Western Nevada County, two opposing trends are in motion: 1) more and more applications for additional housing; and 2) an increasing inventory of approved but not built housing units (this doesn't count existing homes for sale!). What effect does such a large increase in houses and all the things that go with them have on your home value?

To fuel the question with facts:

TOTAL housing planned right now = **3,679**

Approved but not completed = **1,438**

In process = **2,241**

What makes Nevada County so attractive for development in the current housing market? Is it low mitigation fees compared to other jurisdictions? Is it almost guaranteed approval of projects? Is it lax enforcement of conditions of approval (roads, water, sewer)? Or other?

Maybe someone forgot the law of supply and demand: the more something is available the less it is worth.

(Thanks to CCAT and its 470 members for research: <http://ccatnc.wordpress.com/>) [continued on p. 8]

Deer Creek Park 2 – Update

Over six years ago, Terra Alta Development proposed Deer Creek Park 2, a 193 lot subdivision south of Red Dog Road. This March, a compromise was reached between the developer and several community groups. The Nevada County Planning Commission planned to vote on the new proposal August 23rd, 1:30 p.m. The compromise includes:

- Total lots reduced from 193 to 62--1.5 acre minimums--- No second units.
- 341 acre Timber Production Zone parcel to include a conservation easement granted to the County of Nevada or other government entity or appropriate non-profit group which will allow future timber harvest and forest management related activities, but expressly exclude further development and subdividing of the property--- Developed portion of the property including homes and open space to be zoned-X to prohibit further subdivision.
- 42 acre parcel to be deeded to homeowners association for fire buffer around lots with adequate maintenance fee
- Public trail easement along DS Canal and Cascade Ditch to be conveyed to public or non-profit entity.
- 43 acre parcel to be dedicated to City of Nevada City to preserve water quality of Little Deer Creek

Sylvia Pichitino, pich@oro.net

We* Win Protection for Well Owners

Reduced flows and water levels in the Lower Cascade Canal and Upper Grass Valley Canal could harm adjacent wells, as we described previously. This is likely when the Lower Cascade Canal Banner/Cascade Pipeline Project is implemented. For a

review see “Important Information for Well Owners” and “Well Owners Alert” at our website, www.bannermountain.org.

When NID refused to offer any remedy for wells that might become impaired by reduced project flows, we went into action. Comments and suggestions from us and other concerned citizens led NID to reconsider their stance on this issue. As a result the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) covering this project now includes valuable offers of mitigation; we encourage well owners to become fully informed and take advantage of them.

In essence, NID will solicit participation in a well monitoring program before flows and water levels are reduced by the project. This will include owners of parcels located within 150 feet upslope and 300 feet down slope of the canal. If a monitored well suffers impairment, NID will attempt to provide a remedy depending upon the circumstances. If the water is being used for irrigation or purposes other than human consumption, then an untreated water supply can be provided directly from the canal. For human consumption, connection to a treated water line can be considered if practical. Otherwise a small check or dam can be placed in the canal to increase the canal water level and hopefully improve recharge of the affected well.

Full details of these mitigation measures are available online. See the FEIR at www.bcportals.com/nid/lcms/ Click on “Final Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) and read Mitigation Measures 3.4-4a, 3.4-4b and 3.4-4c. (* The Banner Mountain Homeowners Association). For more details on this article contact Willy Kollmeyer at wdkollmeyer@comcast.net or 530- 271- 1378.

Widening Banner Lava Cap Rd.: Nightmare or Mandate?

With the business opportunities for “clearing” has come concern about evacuation. We all know the limitations of our 3 main access roads, and there are strong efforts to develop evacuation processes that we can all use if necessary. But one idea floating around is to widen our roads, particularly Banner Lava Cap to the

full width of the County right-of-way. This would provide shoulders wide enough to allow 4 lanes of traffic in an emergency. Fire vehicles could come up while still allowing multiple lanes of vehicles to exit. This is a wild, massively expensive idea, but we homeowners should weigh in with opposition or support. The Association will represent our homeowners’ wishes.

[continued from p. 1] Here are the details of approved and applied for housing developments (from CCAT):

APPROVED HOUSES – planned or under construction in western Nevada County = 1,438

On county land, there are 866 houses (Saddle Ridge[98], Wolf Creek Ranch Estates[141], Quail Lake Estates[93], Dark Horse[72]; Deer Creek Park 2[62], Wildwood Ridge[388] , Toscano[6] & Winds Aloft[6] (this does not count 2nd units)

In the City of Grass Valley, there are = 572 houses (Ridge Village[49], Ridge Meadows[50], So Auburn Village[57], Town Talk[15], Sierra Terrace[36], Wolf Creek Village[70], Iron Horse 1 and 2[77], Whiting St[67], Makiah Woods[55], Olympia Plaza 2[40], Fisher on Dorsey[33] & other smaller projects.

ACTIVE APPLICATIONS for more housing in western Nevada County = 2,241

In COUNTY (Osborne Hill[76], Kenny Ranch[109], Berriman Ranch[29 initially-final 151], Harmony Ridge[54], Royal Gorge[18], Penn Valley Oaks[36], Pine Ridge Estates[43] & Bear River Plaza[43] = 530

In GRASS VALLEY (Loma Rica Ranch[700], NorthStar[438], Southhill/Bear River[122], Pine Shadows[44], Stamas [E.Main=150] & Old Tunnel Rd[102], Ferguson[24], Bennett/Kidder Sts[20] & some smaller projects = 1,696.

INVITATION to become a MEMBER of the BMHA

For only \$15 per year you can be a member of your neighborhood association! Just fill out the form on the last page and send it with a \$15 check to our address, we'll put you on the member list and send you our newsletter. As you can see in this issue, there are many developments and updates **where you need to be represented.**

Member Benefits

WHAT YOUR DUES GET YOU

A mere \$15/yr gets you the following & more:

- 1) the continued viability of BMHA;
- 2) countless volunteer hours from directors, committee & members;
- 3) a strong united voice regarding concerns of Banner Mtn;
- 4) fire safety programs;
- 5) a voice concerning traffic problems unique to Banner Mtn;
- 6) a voice concerning crime & vandalism in our neighborhoods;
- 7) a voice concerning mining operations and well water problems;
- 8) directors & committees meet regularly on issues affecting Banner Mtn. (There is no compensation for their time);
- 9) periodic newsletters and other mailings concerning local issues;
- 10) reduced propane service cost (see last page) from Ferrel Gas and septic cleaning service from NAVO fees;**
- 11) an influential organization that will listen to your concerns;
- 12) reviews & response to environmental impact reports (EIR's) & legal documents in connection with Banner Mtn developments
- 13) an organization to educate us on upcoming issues of concern;
- 14) a web site www.bannermountain.org to keep you informed
- 15) with your input, BMHA can be almost anything you want it to be

Come on Board

We encourage any one interested in participating to come to a Board Meeting, typically scheduled every



3rd Thursday of the first month of a Quarter (Jan-Apr-Jul-Oct) or contact:

Banner Mountain Homeowners, P.O. Box 833, Nevada City, CA 95959, or to:

Willy Kollmeyer, (271-1378 wdkollmeyer@comcast.net),
or Jeff Toff (265-4402, jrtman50@msn.com)

NOTICES

Recycling: The Department of Transportation & Sanitation wants to encourage more recycling by eliminating the need to sort the various materials. If you are receiving curbside garbage pickup and are not recycling, call Waste Management (274-3090) to request containers. If you do not have curbside service but wish to begin recycling, call the Nevada County Recycling Hotline at 265-1768. For more information call Nichole Dorr (470-2647)



Service Provider Advertising: We will list ads for service providers submitted and recommended by a member.

Any new recommendations?

Board of Directors

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Membership Renewal

Your membership for 2007-2008 is critical. Dues are \$15. Just complete the application/renewal form below, include your email address (absolutely private), and send it with your check in the enclosed envelope.

MEMBERSHIP

For renewal or new application for membership in the



Preferred Propane Provider
For:
Banner Mountain Area Residents

Did you know that Ferrellgas is the *only contracted* Preferred Propane Provider for the Banner Mountain area Residents? For more than 60 years, Ferrellgas has been committed to providing customers with hometown service, backed by the experience of an industry leader in safety and technical expertise. Here are just a few of the advantages you will receive as a Ferrellgas customer.

- Dependable propane supply
- Prompt, reliable service from local propane professionals
- Convenient payment and delivery options
- Around-the-clock emergency service

Banner Mountain Area Residents will also receive these additional benefits:

- Special guaranteed pricing of 0.40 cents over Ferrellgas cost
- Free Tank rental for the first year, after the first year only \$45.00 annually
- **FREE** 27-point safety inspection of your outside propane system (a \$49.95 value)
- Guaranteed supply

To start taking advantage of these special savings or for more details, call your Nevada City Ferrellgas team today at:

530-265-5896

Banner Mountain Homeowners Association,
P O Box 833,
Nevada City,
CA 95959.

Use enclosed envelope to send a check for \$15 payable to the Association for the 2007 dues (Sept'07-Sept. '08)

364 Lower Grass Valley Road • Nevada City, California 95959 • Telephone: 530-265-5896 • FAX: 530-265-5560

Name(s) _____

Address: _____

City/State/ZIPCode: _____

Phone No: _____ Email: _____

I would like to become more involved with _____

Suggested Association activities _____

Banner Mountain Homeowners Association
Member of non-profit :
FEDERATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS
228 COMMERCIAL STREET #277
NEVADA CITY, CA 95959

Service Providers/ Other Comments _____

Non-Profit Org.
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