

## Fire Safety and Fuel Management At The Sea Ranch

The Fire Safety Task Force has determined that The Sea Ranch Community needs to understand what is happening in Fuel Management and Fire Protection at The Sea Ranch. The following white paper provides an overview of the current status of fire protection programs at The Sea Ranch.

### A CURRENT OVERVIEW OF FUEL MANAGEMENT AND FIRE PROTECTION AT THE SEA RANCH

The early fire season in California this year has raised awareness among Association members regarding fire risk at The Sea Ranch, resulting in questions from members about what they can do to reduce those risks, what the Association has done and is doing to reduce risk, what the conditions for wildfire ignition and fire behavior are at The Sea Ranch, and what resources are available for wildfire suppression. The following provides useful information regarding these questions:

#### **A. Protecting Your Home through Creation of a Defensible Space – a Member Responsibility and the #1 Fire Protection Priority.**

- Public Resources Code 4291 (PRC 4291) requires the creation of a Defensible Space around all Sea Ranch homes and other structures. Reminders of this requirement are periodically posted in the *Bulletin*.
- CalFire (formerly CDF) inspects homes to ensure they meet PRC 4291 requirements and to advise homeowners on specific steps they can take to protect their homes. This year, the Board of Directors funded additional inspectors for CalFire to speed up the rate at which all homes and structures at The Sea Ranch will be inspected.
- Association Rule 5.1.03 requires the Association and members to comply with PRC 4291 guidelines and regulations and encourages members to develop agreements on adjoining private lots to meet the spirit of defensible space requirements beyond property lines.
- The Sea Ranch Design Manual and Rules provide for fuel management per the requirements of PRC 4291, and the Department of Design, Compliance and Environmental Management has developed guidelines and procedures for facilitating defensible space implementation beyond private property lines and into common areas, meeting the spirit of PRC 4291 requirements.

#### **B. Association Actions Regarding Fuel Management, Fire Safety, and Emergency Response at The Sea Ranch – a Comprehensive Approach to Fire Safety.**

- The Association has developed and implemented the 2002 Fuels Management Program (Program). The Program is a comprehensive approach to fuel management

Ranch-wide, follows best practices, and was advised by fire safety professionals. The Program addresses fuel management with the following objectives:

- Provide safe evacuation and emergency vehicle access routes.
- Reduce fire intensity near structures.
- Keep fires which start west of Highway One from crossing the highway.
- Minimize the spread of fires that start east of Highway One.
- Limit fire size and intensity
- Minimize fire ignitions.
- Protect valuable natural resources.

The Fuels Management Program addresses the above objectives through Ranch-wide management actions including:

- Creation of Roadside Fuel Breaks – includes vegetation removal up to 100 feet along both sides of critical access roads.
- Creation of Downslope Calming Zones on hillsides east of Highway One which includes limbing of trees and deadwood removal in forests and brush removal/grazing in meadow areas.
- Enlargement and enhancement of the Highway One fuelbreak and firebreak which includes providing a wider mow zone with an earthen firebreak.
- Implementation of a Grazing Program that provides immediate fuel load reduction and long-term control of natural succession.
- Removal of conifers in selected drainages and re-planting with natural riparian vegetation which reduces flammability in “chimneys” by removing flammable species and replacing them with fire resistant true riparian species (willow) that act as a natural fire barrier.
- Monitoring of Bane Bill View Easements to manage growth.

The Program has entered its second 4-year cycle. A Program description is available for further review at the Association office at 975 Annapolis Road.

- The Association’s Board of Directors has provided annual funding of the 2002 Fuels Management Program and prior fuel management plans and has also approved inclusion of the Fuels Management Program into the Association’s 25 Year Commons Management Plan, assuring long-term recognition of the Program’s importance.
- The Association is collaborating with the Sonoma County Fire Safe Council to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for The Sea Ranch. The Association’s Fuels Management Program, a part of this plan, can be a model for other communities. The Association has formed its own local Fire Safe Council to continue this collaboration.
- The Association has created the Emergency Management Department, staffed with the Director of Emergency Management. This department is responsible for planning, organizing, directing and controlling the emergency management functions for response to disasters such as earthquake, wildfire, tsunami, terrorism, and hazardous material spills. The Director of Emergency Management also

supports The Sea Ranch Fire Safe Council, is staff liaison to the Fire Safety Task Force, and provides oversight for the PRC 4291 inspection program.

- The Association, in collaboration with CalFire and The Sea Ranch Volunteer Fire Department (TSRVFD), is developing a Disaster Operations capability. This is based upon the Standardized Emergency Management System and establishes the guidance for disaster response operations in providing resources to protect life and property.
- The Association staff works in close collaboration with CalFire to initiate CalFire suggested improvements to the Fuels Management Program and to facilitate the creation of defensible space around members' homes.
- In collaboration with CalFire, the Association has initiated a process to alert The Sea Ranch community to high and extreme fire danger days. This fall, Fire Danger signs will be placed at several key locations around The Sea Ranch. CalFire will make the fire danger assessment daily and will notify Sea Ranch Security, who will then change the Fire Danger signs as appropriate. The purpose of this effort is to increase community awareness of wildfire potential and reduce fire-risk behavior at critical times.
- The Association's Board of Directors has recently appointed a Fire Safety Task Force (FSTF). The FSTF is comprehensively reviewing the current fire safety programs at The Sea Ranch and will offer recommendations for improvements to the Board.

### **C. Wildfire Weather Conditions Unique to The Sea Ranch.** [Provided by Shelley Spear, CalFire Fire Captain]

- The ocean influence present at The Sea Ranch has with it two unique features as it relates to wildfires. One is wind and the other is humidity. Wind will influence fire spread more than any other factor, and this makes it our biggest concern. The wind consistently present on The Sea Ranch is from the northwest, bringing with it higher humidity off of the ocean. The higher humidity decreases the fire intensity, allowing for more success in suppression and more likely survivability when homeowners have maintained a defensible space.
- The Sea Ranch has very limited days when fire danger is extreme. Red Flag Warning (Extreme Fire Weather) days inland rarely include the North Coast, because we rarely have days of low humidity with hot, dry wind. In fact, Extreme Fire Weather inland often pulls fog onshore. When an Extreme Fire Weather day warning that does incorporate the North Coast is forecast, that information will be passed onto the Association for distribution. That day will likely have humidity below 35% and wind that is not coming off of the ocean. (Ocean-borne winds will generally not allow humidity to get to critically low levels.) The rare lightning occurrence would also be cause for an Extreme Fire Weather notification.

### **D. Firefighting Resources - Who Shows Up to Fight the Fire** [Provided by Shelley Spear, CalFire Fire Captain]

- Fire suppression resources are very limited in the initial stages of a wildfire at The Sea Ranch. We are an isolated community with long travel times for out-of-area resources. The initial response resources available on The Sea Ranch are four fire engines in the summertime, and we have automatic aid agreements with Timber Cove and South Coast (Gualala) for assistance. There also is an additional CalFire Engine at Point Arena that will be responding.
- Upon a 911 activation for a fire on a high fire danger day, dispatched immediately will be out-of-area CalFire resources including 2 air tankers, 1 helicopter, 2 bulldozers, 2 hand crews (17 persons each), 6 fire engines and a Battalion Chief. These resources are coming from Sonoma County and are in addition to the volunteer fire company response. Upon arrival of the “first in” officer, these resources will either be augmented or reduced depending on the situation found.
- In addition to the resources described above, the Association makes the following additional resources available to CalFire and TSRVFD: a JD 450 bulldozer, a dump truck and trailer, three rubber tire tractors, a 500-gallon water buffalo, and, when on site or on call, Association field crews with fire fighting hand tools and radio communication.

*As this document states, the most immediate fire protection priority is for homeowners to create a defensible space around their homes. Next month’s Bulletin will contain specific guidelines and procedures on steps homeowners can take to create a defensible space on their own property, on adjacent commons, and on neighboring properties.*

*In the meantime, Sea Ranch members should read the **FireSafeSonoma** brochure, which provides detailed information on creating a defensible space. This brochure is available at the Association office or online at [www.firesafesonoma.org](http://www.firesafesonoma.org).*

*The preceding information was provided by:*

*The Sea Ranch Association,  
Cal Fire/The Sea Ranch Fire Department,  
The Sea Ranch Design Committee*