



Success Stories from the Western Region

FireScape Monterey: Keeping Wildfire in Its Natural Place

When you picture the central California coast, you might think of windswept beaches, seaside homes, and golf courses. But this picturesque area, home to many up-scale communities, is also adjacent to 10 rugged wilderness areas that together comprise about 48% of the Los Padres National Forest. While the Forest provides world-class recreation and wilderness opportunities, wildfire threat also comes with the territory.

In 1999 a wildfire burned a large portion of the Monterey Ranger District and several homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). This was a wake-up call for fire managers and community members alike. Planning and coordination efforts were undertaken, and some progress toward preparation and mitigation was made. But in 2008, the Basin Complex fires consumed 27 homes in the area, causing extensive damage to private and public property. The need for a proactive, broad scale, coordinated approach to fire management in the Monterey District was clear.

To help guide the process, the U.S. Forest Service reached out to the U. S. Fire Learning Network (USFLN) for help in developing an effective collaborative effort to address the myriad interests and values that intertwine with fire in their landscape. FireScape Monterey was born.

Over 27 organizations, plus residents of several local communities participated actively, and together crafted a vision statement for the group: FireScape Monterey promotes protection of both life and property affected by wildfire and healthy resilient ecosystems through collaborative stewardship. Undergirding the vision are the stakeholders' shared values, identified by participants through a series of workshops facilitated by USFLN personnel. Those values are:

Additional Resources

A USFLN profile of FireScape Monterey can be accessed at:

http://www.conservationgateway.org/sites/default/files/FireScape_v26Mar12.pdf

FireScape Monterey's blueprint for action can be accessed at:

http://api.ning.com/files/KUwQ-FuB4NTXbBXGLfRQT9os0Kac6HUwXmA6xRSd-Kf39vUFT-MZNGyCGahYPRwfXLOzDAX9t-MxICC*VB8kSjVKy9QZHRzHY3/FireScape_Blueprint_v8_16Apr2012.docx

For Further Information

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- Fire adapted human communities
- Healthy watersheds
- Native biodiversity
- Cultural resources
- Aesthetic, natural and wilderness qualities of the northern Santa Lucia Mountains

An 11-person core leadership team focuses on conducting activities in support of those values. Currently the team includes stakeholders from the Los Padres National Forest, California Wilderness Project, Coast Property Owners' Association, University of California-Santa Cruz, CalFire, Mal Paso Creek Property Owners' Association, Ventana Wilderness Alliance, the Esselen Tribe, and Horan, Lloyd, Karachale, Dyer, Schwartz, Law & Cook, Inc. An all-volunteer organization, FireScape Monterey accomplishes its work through projects carried out by its own members and other community volunteers.

So far, their strategies are aligning to not only protect the shared values of the group, but to address skyrocketing firefighting costs, safety concerns and inefficiencies. One of the innovative steps the group is currently taking involves creating an integrated pre-attack plan that articulates not only what on-the-ground treatments the group wants to implement, but how Incident Command Teams can use them when the next wildfire strikes. Once complete, this pre-attack plan will supplement the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

On-the-ground treatments recommended include a series of fire breaks and planned pre-treatments. Beginning with historic fire lines and building from there under the guidance of USFS fire personnel, FireScape Monterey has charted critical areas and initiated NEPA planning documents that would support the creation and maintenance of this critical infrastructure. Continued discussion and coordination among agencies to formalize their unified pre-attack planning continues.

Working in a fire-adapted landscape, this group, like many others, has recognized that fire plays a multi-faceted role in the ecosystem. This means FireScape Monterey's solutions must go beyond just protecting homes. As their slogan – "Keeping Wildfire in Its Natural Place" – says, it takes more than simply fighting wildfires; it requires the community to develop adaptive and resilient systems. Thus FireScape Monterey is pursuing all three goals of the Cohesive Strategy in an integrated, mutually supportive manner.

