



Making a Healthy Forest Environment



The last newsletter provided recommendations for pre-evacuation planning for inside your house, outside your house, and for your animals. It also gave guidelines as to when to evacuate. Be prepared to take action during a community fire. Despite taking steps to create and maintain defensible space around your home and despite taking steps to harden your home against wildfire in our community, a fire evacuation order may be issued.

Sue McCourt, a Fire Prevention Specialist, delivered the new Lake Almanor Peninsula Wildfire Evacuation Routes Map last month. Every member should have one posted in their LACC home, especially for use by renters, family, or guests. They are available at the Clifford Gate, the LACC office, and from your Firewise Committee. Barbara MacArthur, Firewise Chairperson (v. FireNews16_8)

FOREST VEGETATION DENSITY HAS BEEN RISING

Early pictures of the LACC development indicate that the density and height of our forest vegetation was much less than it is now. Here's one obtained from a hanging picture in the Old Mill Café in Westwood. In the LACC office conference



room there is a 1965 aerial photo of the development which shows a lesser density of trees and shrubs. The developers likely harvested excess trees for financial reasons just before selling

residential lots, but in any case, the density and height of trees, shrubs and houses has increased considerably from those early days.

Historically, our forests have contained 50 - 70 trees per acre, and today our forests have more than 500 - 1,000 trees per acre – increasing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. A high density tree forest is not a healthy forest and presents potential fire hazards, particularly in extended episodes of drought. In historic forests, natural fires would reduce tree density and remove weakened trees, the undergrowth brush and wild grasses. Due to human encroachment into forests, natural and non-natural fires are not desirable and therefore fought aggressively which lessens the natural thinning process.

Residential developments in forests can add sources of fire and combustibles to a forest. Such development can also contribute to high density growth in a wildland environment. Therefore, it is left to community residents in wildland areas to nurture a healthy forest, reduce overgrowth, and eliminate unnecessary sources of disease, fire and combustibles.

Here are typical issues related to a high density tree forest:

- Lack of adequate tree spacing creates reduced light for trees and can result in weakened undergrowth directly beneath larger, healthy trees.
- Weakened undergrowth can result in death of tree components, potential “fire ladders” and in disease which can transfer to adjacent healthy trees.

- Disease results in death to some or all tree components.
- Drought periods can diminish tree health and exacerbate disease and death to tree components.

What should and can LACC members be doing to promote a healthy forest environment, one that will also support fire prevention and make it easier for fire fighters in case of fire? The answer is quite a bit can be done by an annual review your lot for important issues and taking action to minimize their existence. These issues can be grouped into the following:

A. Control (decrease) tree and plant density and eliminate unnecessary young trees (e.g. saplings) before they become costly to remove.



Fig. 2 Small saplings grow into large and overly dense groves

B. Changes to landscaping and new plantings should comply with Defensible Space Guidelines using non-gasoline type plantings.



Fig. 3 Example of overly dense fire ladder with junipers underlying taller and taller pines.

C. Manage sizes of combustibles or eliminate combustibles under trees in conjunction with pruning up trees.



Fig. 4 Pruned up trees with no underlying grass or bushes

D. Reduce or eliminate combustibles next to structures or under decks.



Fig. 5 Fire embers can reach under decks

E. Regularly remove dead trees and shrubs, dead branches, and diseased portions of trees.



Fig. 6 Dead branches extend to ground above flammable needles bed.

F. Restrict your use of fire in compliance with local guidelines and make sure your equipment won't start fires.

Source: <http://www.calforestfoundation.org/wildfire/>

NEXT MONTH: *How Well Does Your Insurance Policy Work in a Wildland Community*