

October 1, 2018

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
105 East Anapamu Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101



**Re: Fuels Management and Community Defensible Space – October 2, 2018, Agenda Item #4 (18-00776)**

Dear Chair Williams and members of the Board:

As our climate continues to change, fire season expands, and extreme weather worsens, we must look for sensible, long-term solutions to the growing issue of protecting our communities from wildfire. We must develop enduring, science-based policies that directly address climate change, increased development in the wildland-urban interface, and providing firefighters and early responders with the tools they need to improve fire detection and evacuation systems.

The Board is considering recommendations about vegetation management as a strategy to mitigate the impacts of wildfire in our area. While some of these recommendations, such as ensuring homes have defensible space, are important, we encourage the Board to recognize that methods such as fuel breaks and prescribed fire will not fully address the dangers posed by wildfires to our local communities.

Dr. Jack Cohen, a research scientist with the U.S. Forest Service, spent decades conducting extensive investigations which found that home ignitions due to wildfire were unlikely when flames and ember-caused ignitions occurred more than 120 feet from the home. He concluded in a U.S. Forest Service technical report, "...effective fuel modification for reducing potential WUI (wildland/urban interface) fire losses need only occur within a few tens of meters from a home, not hundreds of meters or more from a home. This research indicates that home losses can be effectively reduced by focusing mitigation efforts on the structure and its immediate surroundings."

Science has shown that smart, targeted vegetation treatments are certainly a part of the overall solution. However, we must spend an equal amount of time and resources — or more — to measures that science has demonstrated to be most effective in protecting communities from wildfire. These include reducing new development in fire-prone areas. Over the past 25 years, nearly 300 homes have been built within state-designated Very High or High Fire Hazard Severity Zones just in the Santa Barbara Frontcountry between Refugio Pass and the Ventura County line. Curbing this type of risky development is vital to the safety of people and property in these areas and the firefighters who risk their lives to protect them. We must also look to initiatives that would encourage and assist homeowners to make their homes more fire-safe. And we should consider that large wildfires will continue to occur and impact our communities and therefore work to improve our early warning and evacuation systems for people and their animals.

As communities across Southern California grapple with the growing challenge of protecting communities from wildfire, we can look to strategies that have been employed elsewhere with success. One such model is the City of Monrovia, which developed a robust Community Wildfire Protection Plan focused nearly entirely on reducing structural ignitability, improving defensible space immediately around homes, and enhancing development requirements.

In the wake of several major wildfires, Santa Barbara County has an opportunity itself to serve as a model in how communities can implement comprehensive, effective, and science-based solutions to the growing threat of wildfire. We look forward to working with all stakeholders to find the best ways to protect our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryant Baker".

Bryant Baker, M.S.  
Conservation Director