

October 1, 2018

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

Re: Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors Hearing, October 2, 2018 - Agenda Item #5 (18-00796)

Dear County Supervisors:

I am a Professor of plant ecology/vegetation science at UC Santa Barbara where I hold a joint position between Environmental Studies and the Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology. I have taught courses on the Ecology and Management of California Vegetation for two decades, and I conduct research related to chaparral ecology and management. Additionally, I have conducted research and published about the relationship between invasive grasses and fire regimes since 1990.

The San Marcos Pass - Eastern Goleta Valley Mountainous Communities CWPP gives lip service to the importance of structure hardening and to the importance of individual homeowners creating safe zones around their houses. Yet its focus is largely on land clearing whether along roads or in the creation of large fuel breaks, actions that take responsibility away from the homeowner. These latter actions are easier to obtain funding for, and they show the public that the agencies are 'doing something'. Yet fire fighters themselves rank houses as "winners, losers or workers", so why is there not more focus on helping homes become "winners"?

The CWPP does not take into account the guidelines of the 2014 National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy created in a collaborative process driven by federal agencies by the USFS(see <https://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/cohesivestrategy.shtml>). The Strategy focuses on three issues, the first two of which are not emphasized in the CWPP. These are: (1) restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes [meant to include wildland animals and plants], (2) creating fire adapted communities, and (3) responding to wildfires. Rather than focusing entirely on fuel treatments, the National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy focuses on diverse pathways through which the risk of exposure to and losses from wildfire can be achieved. This is in contrast to the CWPP.

A potential model to guide improvements in the CWPP is the North Topanga Canyon Firesafe Committee's approach to decreasing structure loss. There, fire and land management agencies, homeowners and other representatives have put together a plan to avoid excessive cutting of native vegetation, while improving structure protection from the home out. The committee has created teams of volunteers who are trained in home assessment to help homeowners identify ways in which their homes are vulnerable and ways that they can improve the likelihood that their homes will survive during wildfire. They run workshops, give talks and have also created videos for homeowners with such information in them. Because the Santa Barbara front country has a very long wildland urban interface, thousands of home owners could benefit from information and incentives to 'harden their homes'. SB County could provide homeowners with ember safe vent screening and participate in grants to help with home retrofits. The brochure suggested by the CWPP is simply not enough.

In conclusion, the CWPP you are considering does little to bring our area into the forefront of community wildfire protection. Rather it falls back on the age old pattern of 'brush removal', a behavior that has not proven to be successful over many decades and that can have many negative environmental consequences. I believe we could be at the forefront of adaptive fire mitigation strategies in shrubland ecosystems and I encourage you to insist that we go there.

Sincerely,

Carla D'Antonio

Dr. Carla M. D'Antonio