

June 4, 2019



Protecting Marin Since 1934

Board of Supervisors  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 329  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Board of Supervisors,

The Marin Conservation League's Fire and Environment Working Group (FEWG) has reviewed the Marin County Civil Grand Jury report entitled "Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach." Climate change and other factors have exacerbated wildfire risks and we are now witnessing wildfires in California that outstrip all previous fires in size and destructiveness. As Marin County educates and prepares its citizens for wildfire, Marin Conservation League is advocating for additional community dialogue, education and cooperative efforts with public agencies so that environmental resources are protected while at the same time, creating wildfire preparedness.

We appreciate the Grand Jury tackling this important subject and their conclusions are compelling:

*F1. Existing vegetation management codes are both inconsistent and inconsistently enforced.*

*F2. There are not enough trained vegetation inspectors or fuel reduction crews.*

*F3. Current vegetation enforcement procedures are slow, difficult and expensive.*

*F4. Government agencies and safety authorities cannot currently manage vegetation on public lands.*

*F5. All property owners are responsible for vegetation management on their property, yet they are not sufficiently educated about vegetation management and many do not have the physical and financial resources to create defensible space.*

Towards a similar goal of creating defensible space and educating the public, MCL has begun discussions among community stakeholders, FIREsafe Marin, Marin County Parks, Marin County Fire, Marin Municipal Water District, and state and federal parks, in order to support efforts to make Marin's communities safe and its wildlands ecologically resilient. We would like to share our early comments on this important subject. With the understanding that vegetation serves important ecological and cultural functions in the landscape as well as posing a fuel threat, vegetation management guidance in neighborhoods needs to include ecological principles and reflect community values wherever possible. We have heard community concerns regarding the prospect of unnecessary tree and shrub removal, the fear of wholesale removal of landscape vegetation, loss of wildlife habitat especially near streams, loss of plants crucial for pollinators, issues of soil health, erosion, runoff, unintentional spread of non-native invasive plants, and slope stability, not to mention loss of aesthetic appeal. By addressing these concerns during defensible space planning, consistent and wide-scale defensible space improvements that also conserve environmental resources are more likely to be successfully implemented.

1) Conversion of existing homeowner landscapes to more fire-safe conditions actually offer the opportunity to increase biodiversity and carbon capture if done properly. Multiple benefits can be achieved when fuels are managed and native plant communities are restored in the process.

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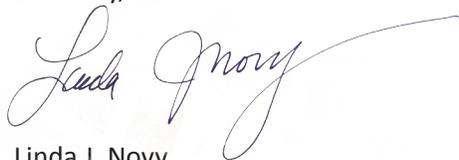
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- 2) Education is key. Environmental organizations are stepping forward to fill the ecological information gap in defensible space so that homeowners can make the best possible decisions in making their landscapes fire safe. MCL is working with local jurisdictions and the county to support fire agencies with better information regarding ecological considerations so that both fire department inspectors and homeowners can make the best decisions.
- 3) Contrary to remarks by the Grand Jury report about unnamed environmental activists, MCL supports carefully considered ecologically-based vegetation management.
- 4) MCL supports public land management agency efforts for healthy and resilient forest conditions across Marin's public lands. Grand Jury comments regarding public land management emphasize the small percent of total lands managed for fuel reduction. However, not all public lands need management for fuel reduction. Agencies are rightly focusing on the creation of strategic fuel breaks alongside neighborhoods and communities. For Marin's forests that exist away from neighborhoods, action to make them more resilient in the face of intense wildfires is needed as well, but these kinds of habitat-based projects are expensive and won't necessarily make communities measurably safer.
- 5) The Grand Jury report addresses preparedness in advance of and response during wildfire, but, does not touch on post-fire issues such as debris clean up, water/air quality, rebuilding to higher standards, managing renewal and recovery of the landscape itself, and many other factors.

We applaud the Grand Jury's call to action and fully support the overall aims of making our neighborhoods safe and natural areas resilient in the face of destructive wildfires. We recognize that all stakeholders: government bodies, community groups, and individual citizens, need to act at a pace and scale sufficient to meet the challenges that lie ahead. We are working diligently to support ecological-wise and fire-safe changes. We encourage greater community engagement on the part of county leadership for educating and building support with all stakeholders. Determining the most effective communication strategies and implementing those strategies is essential.

Sincerely,



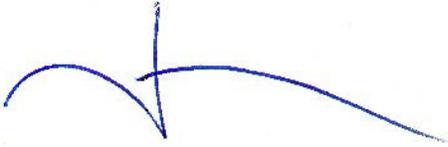
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