

Vegetation Treatment Program

And

Current Plan

Whose friend is it?

Forestry/CalFire have proposed vast clearance of wildland to reduce fire threat to homes.

But will it?

Community wildfire risk should be defined as a home ignition problem,
not a wildfire control problem – Jack Cohen, PhD Wildfire Scientist

Funding

Don't mistake activity for achievement – John Wooden

California lacks a strategic wildfire plan – LAO

CalFire Budget 2020-21

\$2.5 billion (\$1.8 for wildland "treatment")

Funding

General Fund, Cap & Trade

Home hardening:

0, Unknown

Homeowners, AB 38 future pilot grants

The VTP Program (Iteration 5 since 2005) and Current Plan

VTP - for control of: **Non-wind-driven** fires, which generally cause minimal loss of structures and lives
Part of \$7 billion bond funding – withdrawn from ballot, for now

Current Plan: **Same** wildland clearance program with General Fund and Cap & Trade monies

Plan for clearance:

20+ million acres of wildland

At the rate of **250,000 acres/year** of state and private land

Plus another **250,000 acres/year** – Governor's demand

Treatment:

Prescribed burns

Mastication

Logging

Chemical herbicides

Weed trimming

Soil disturbance

CEQA change:

Program EIR: One size fits all. No more individual projects. North, south, east, west, all will be subject to the same checklist of predetermined and ineffective mitigation measures, amounting to a rubberstamp.

Winners and Losers!

<u>Whose policy?</u>	California Board of Forestry/CalFire
<u>Who benefits?</u>	Timber, agriculture, pesticide companies, CalFire
<u>Who pays?</u>	Taxpayers
<u>Who suffers?</u>	Those at risk of wind-driven wildfires, wildlife habitat, chaparral. Climate change
<u>What's the problem?</u>	Chaparral naturally burns every 30 – 150+ years. Human-caused fires have increased the frequency to < 10 years in some areas. What replaces chaparral? Invasive grasses and mustard , which are fire accelerants . Clearing chaparral by any "treatment" permits growth of invasives, resulting in increased fire risk. Native plants are more resistant to and protective against fire.

What to do!

Harden Homes

Eliminate Ignition Points

Underground wires

No mechanical, sparking tools on red flag days

DMV eliminates sparking vehicles

Camping and hiking restrictions on Red Flag Days

Roadside barriers

Recommendations: Scientists recommend policy. Botanists certified by California Native Plant Society manage. Trained native plant gardeners execute.

Remove invasives, not natives. Restore native habitat

Save your house and community:

Harden the house. Space, tidy up and irrigate plants. Remove invasives. How to do this:

"From the House Outward," Rick Halsey, <https://www.californiachaparral.org/>

[https://www.californiachaparral.org/_static/b69921e9868e8d87be914a31af4c4b90/from-the-house-outward-v4\(3\).pdf?dl=1](https://www.californiachaparral.org/_static/b69921e9868e8d87be914a31af4c4b90/from-the-house-outward-v4(3).pdf?dl=1)

<http://www.californiachaparral.org/bprotectingyourhome.html> <https://www.reddit.com/r/chaparral/>

Demand that Governor Newsom and legislators change the destructive Current Plan and proposed VTP to a protective and restorative program based on science, not special interests!

The Science

Who opposes VTP in its current form?

Center for Biological Diversity	Sierra Club	Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation
California Native Plant Society	Los Angeles Audubon Society	Malibu Monarch Project
Chaparral Institute	Sequoia Forest Keeper	Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation
Endangered Habitats League	Santa Barbara Urban Creeks	John Muir Project
The Chaparral Lands Conservancy	Los Padres Forest Watch	+ others

Wildfire scientists and advocates:

Stephen Davis, PhD	stephen.davis@pepperdine.edu	Jon Keeley, PhD	jon_keeley@usgs.gov
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Rick Halsey, MA	rwh@californiachaparral.org	Alexandra Syphard, PhD	asyphard@yahoo.com
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Where prescribed burns may be appropriate:

Prescribed burns are an important management strategy in mixed conifer forests in the sierras and in northern California where there are lightning-ignited fires where fire has been suppressed and where heavy fuel loads exist.

Links

After the Woolsey Fire

http://www.californiachaparral.com/images/Gov_Newsom_Wildfires_2019.pdf Problem, explained Jan 2019

<http://lvhf.org/2019/08/fire-fact-forum-success/> Drs. Keeley, Davis, Riley

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2019-10-14/newsom-clear-cutting-rim-fire-california>

<https://wildfiretoday.com/tag/jack-cohen/> 9.20.20 Jack Cohen, PhD, David Strohmaier

Before the Woolsey Fire, a sampling

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/03/opinion/03fotheringham.html> Blazed and Confused Nov 3 2007

By C. J. Fotheringham, Jon E. Keeley, Philip W. Rundel

<https://www.publish.csiro.au/wf/WF14024> International Journal of Wildland Fire, Syphard and Keeley 2014

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-xpm-2013-mar-11-la-ed-wildfire-report-cal-fire-20130311-story.html>

Anna Jacobsen, PhD, CSUB, explains the relationship between too frequent burns and chaparral destruction. However, any habitat destruction will have a similar effect:

Many studies have described the negative impact of too frequent burning on chaparral within the Santa Monica Mountains. Too frequent fire can exacerbate changes that are already happening due to drought and short fire return intervals, which deplete seedbanks, are a major impediment to recovery of sites. These factors and their association with vegetation type conversion were recently reviewed in a study using examples and photos from the Santa Monica Mountains (Jacobsen and Pratt 2018).

We have known since 2004 that fires that were less than 10 years apart caused local extinction of some species (such as the bigpod *Ceanothus* that Dr. Davis discussed in his presentation) and there were large losses with fires less than 12 years apart. When the shrubs are lost, invasive annuals increase in their abundance (Jacobsen et al. 2004).

Over many years, studies on this have increased and the impacts of too frequency fire have been quantified. The losses to the chaparral have been extensive (Syphard et al. 2019) and linked to too much fire on the landscape. *"The primary mechanism behind shrubland decline and replacement was short intervals between fires (<=10 years), and type conversion was most likely to occur in arid parts of the landscape with low topographic heterogeneity and close proximity to trails and roads"* (Syphard et al. 2019).

The latest Forest Service General Technical Report on management of chaparral in the face of recent and future drought is a policy of minimal disturbance and vegetative removal or fuels reduction, because the costs of such activities are degraded chaparral and increased future fire risk (Fettig et a. 2019).

Fettig CJ, Wuenschel A, Balachowski J, Butz RJ, **Jacobsen AL**, North MP, Ostojka SM, Pratt RB, Standiford RB. **2019**. Managing effects of drought in California. (Pp. 71-93 in Effects of drought on forests and rangelands in the United States. Vose, James M.; Peterson, David L.; Luce, Charles H.; Patel-Weynand, Toral., eds. Gen. Tech. Rep. WO-98. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Washington Office. 227 pages).

<https://www.csub.edu/~ajacobsen/Fettig%20et%20al%202019%20Managing%20drought%20in%20California.pdf>

Jacobsen, A.L., Davis, S.D. and Fabritius, S.L., 2004. Fire frequency impacts non-sprouting chaparral shrubs in the Santa Monica Mountains of southern California. *Ecology, conservation and management of mediterranean climate ecosystems*. Millpress, Rotterdam, Netherlands. <http://www.csub.edu/~ajacobsen/Jacobsen%20et%20al%202004%20Fire%20return%20interval%20impacts.pdf>

Jacobsen, A.L. and Pratt, R.B., 2018. Extensive drought-associated plant mortality as an agent of type-conversion in chaparral shrublands. *New Phytologist*, 219(2), pp.498-504.

<http://www.csub.edu/~ajacobsen/Jacobsen%20&%20Pratt%202018%20NP%20Tansley%20Insight%20Chaparral%20mortality.pdf>

Syphard, A.D., Brennan, T.J. and Keeley, J.E., 2019. Drivers of chaparral type conversion to herbaceous vegetation in coastal Southern California. *Diversity and Distributions*, 25(1), pp.90-101. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ddi.12827>

Rick Halsey has clearly described the important issues in several of his papers. Here is a nicely summarized description of some of the issues.

Halsey, R.W. and Syphard, A.D., 2015. High-severity fire in chaparral: Cognitive dissonance in the shrublands. In *The Ecological Importance of Mixed-Severity Fires* (pp. 177-209). Elsevier.

"Prescribed burning...has been shown to seriously compromise chaparral plant communities... One of the problems with prescribed burning in chaparral is that there is a narrow window when such burns can occur: in the cool season (late spring). Plants have too much moisture in their tissues in the winter and early spring months to carry a fire. In the summer and fall, the risk of wildfire is too high because of low moisture levels and weather conditions. As a consequence, prescribed burns are conducted when the chaparral ecosystem is most vulnerable. The plants are growing, the soil is still moist, many animal species are breeding, and some birds are occupying the chaparral during their annual migrations. Thus significant ecological damage can occur as a result of a prescribed burn (Knapp et al., 2009).

"The exact mechanisms are not clearly understood, but cool-season burns likely cause significant damage to plant growth tissues and destroy seeds in the soil as soil moisture turns into steam. A prescribed burn conducted in the 1990s in Pinnacles National Park, California, led to immediate type conversion of chaparral to nonnative grassland (Keeley, 2006). An escaped prescribed burn in 2013 consumed more than 1090 ha of fragile desert habitat in San Felipe Valley, California, much of which was chaparral that was recovering from a fire 11 years before. The fire seriously compromised one of the last old-growth desert chaparral stands in the region (CCI, 2013)(Figure 7.9)."

https://lpfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2015_Halsey-and-Syphard_High-Severity-Fire-in-Chaparral.pdf