

10/26/07

Dear Fellow Chaparralians,

There are so many questions and so much sadness to deal with the past week it is difficult to see it ending any time soon. But I wanted to send you a few thoughts as to my situation and what has generally happened because of the fires in San Diego County. Please consider this **Issue #24 of The Chaparralian**. I doubt I will have time to put out another full issue until the end of the year.

I first want to remind everyone to reserve a few quiet moments some time this afternoon or this evening to send beautiful and helpful thoughts to the families of the five USFS firefighters who were killed in the Esperanza fire in Riverside County one year ago today. I can't even begin to imagine the loss. You might want to consider donating to the [Wildland Firefighter Foundation](#). It's a great group.

Our Home

The Witch fire came within about ¼ mile of our home in Escondido. Along with several neighbors, we ignored the mandatory evacuation order. We were prepared to defend our homes from the flames. Although I am grateful our families and homes are now safe, I feel both guilty and heart broken that I could not leave and help defend other homes nearby that were eventually taken by the flames Monday morning.

Rupert Murdoch Media

If you saw the article about me on the front page of yesterday's Wall Street Journal, being the "self promoting gadfly" that I proudly am, I just want you to know that the reporter did everything he could to make me say that I had finally seen the light: chaparral is evil and needs to be eliminated. Nope, I didn't bite. I repeatedly mentioned that there are three basic components to the fire risk reduction equation: location, building design, and proper defensible space in that order of importance. So he took a few quotes out of context and tried to make it sound like I had regrets about loving the natural environment. And no, I am not going to add some kind of disclaimer on my website about chaparral being a high fire risk. The warning has been front and center for a very long time. I do think, however, I will write a song about, "the thrill that'll getcha when you get your name on the cover of the WSJ" (with apologies to Dr. Hook): [Listen to the tune here](#).

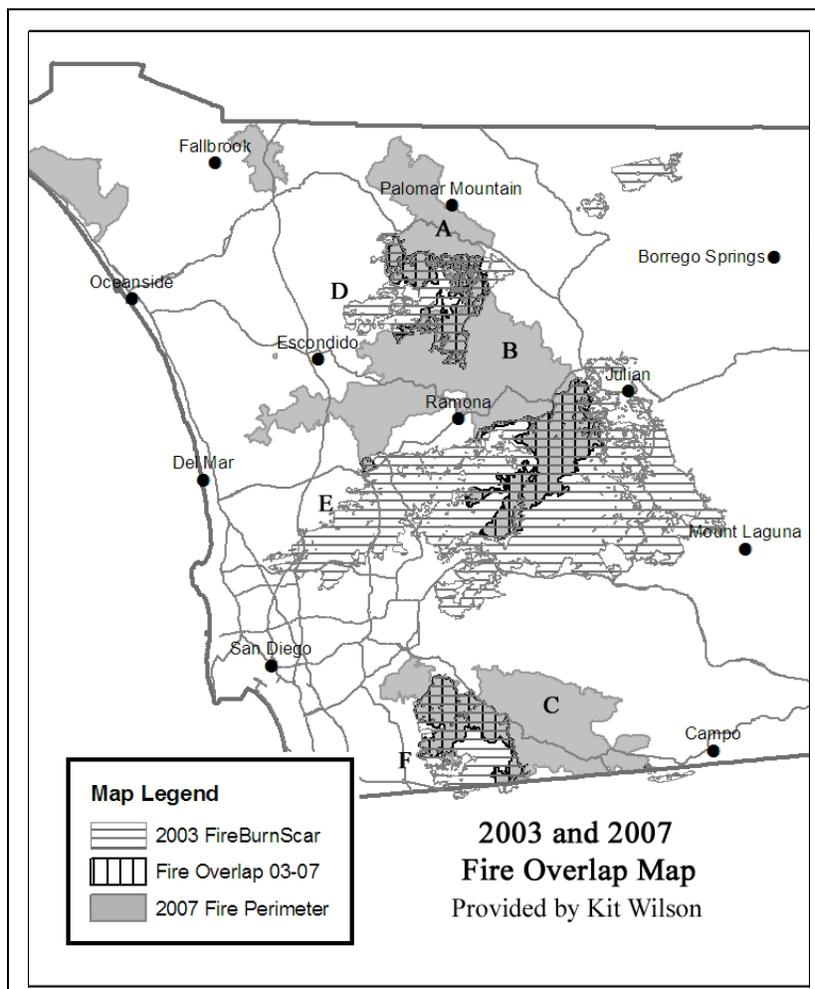
During several interviews I gave on Fox TV News last night and again on the radio today I have learned first hand how completely idiotic conservative hate media really is. I have endeavored in the past to avoid political labels and discussing issues beyond my basic focus, but damn it, these people are really fanatics. Facts are irrelevant. All that matters is the entertainment value of the segment. Ironically, I did have a chance to meet Roger Hedgecock on the way out of the studio. I shook his hand, said my name loud and clear

and went on my way. He can now put my smile to my name. Maybe I should call his show today and say hi for the San Diego Fire Department. If you really want to read more about my take on the guy, please see the [Talk Radio](#) page on our website.

Misinformation

UC geography professor Richard Minnich and timber industry advocate Tom Bonnicksen are all over the media this week blaming the USFS, environmentalists, and failed fire suppression policies for the fires. I'm not sure how these guys reconcile the fact that 2/3rds of San Diego County's Paradise fire scar and nearly a 1/4th of the Cedar fire scar was re-burned in the Witch fire and about 1/2 of the Otay fire scar was re-burned in the Harris fire this week, but I'm sure they are in complete denial.

Below is a map that shows the fire overlaps. The fires have obviously spread since so the perimeters are larger. The re-burned areas are now set up for an ecological disaster because it is likely the obligate seeding species' seedlings (from the 2003 fires) are now dead. No seeds are available to replace them since it takes at least ten years for the shrubs to mature enough to begin restoring the seed bank. The re-sprouters have been stressed by yet another fire in addition to the drought. Their mortality will probably be significant. These areas are now likely to become permanent weed lots.



I wrote a long, passionate letter to Warren Olney, host to a public radio show in Los Angeles, several months after his guest Richard Minnich said (after the Griffith Park fire) that drought conditions really didn't have much impact on fires and that it was all about old vegetation. A number of folks who saw the letter told me I was out of line to attack Dr. Minnich in the way I did. Well, I admit I may have been a bit too intense, but everything I wrote was carefully researched and based on facts. If you would like to read the toned down version, you can request a copy from me or read it on Wildlandfire.com. There is also a detailed analysis of what is wrong with what Dr. Bonnicksen tells the media on our website's [Industry Advocate](#) page.

For those of you who still think I am wrong about singling out these two guys, there comes a time when a viewpoint becomes so disconnected from the accepted body of scientific knowledge that it distracts from constructive dialogue. It then becomes important to discuss the messenger. I hope to see the day when those who deny the impact of frequent fires and vilify firefighters, chaparral, and those who care deeply about nature, are no longer taken seriously. A similar fate has befallen members of the flat earth society during NASA briefings.

On a More Positive Note

Government leaders really did an excellent job this time around carrying out evacuations, setting up evacuation centers, communicating information, and trying to get the story right. We've learned a lot since the 2003 fires. The kindness and love many of you have expressed has been overwhelming. Thank you.

Please feel free to use any of this material to help educate friends or any reporters you may know. We need to continue educating our local media reps and political leaders that wildland fire is not so much about vegetation, but about appropriate land planning. I'll detail much of this in two different editorials in the upcoming week, one in the [San Diego Union Tribune](#) and the other in the [North County Times](#).

Please Stay Safe,

Gadfly Rick

P.S. Here are a few good articles that are helping to spread the truth and dispel the hate mongering. Please spread them around if you feel it appropriate:

An AP story on "Frequent Fires Imperil Native Plants"

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5iacPXW1AFD3F9Wr1LoHErAcfwHZA>

Jeff Brady did a good job discussing the [Shelter in Place concept on NPR's Morning edition today](#).