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FireSafe Council
Lake Hodges
Escondido, CA

March 5, 2010

Dear Members of the Lake Hodges Fire Safe Council,

As a resident of the Council's planning area and an expert on wildfire and chaparral ecology I would like to thank you for leading an outstanding community effort to help make our community better prepared for wildfire.

I am also the director of the California Chaparral Institute, a non-profit, 501(c)3 corporation that specializes in analyzing Community Wildfire Protection Plans in addition to carrying out research and educational programs to help the public and government agencies better understand the fire-prone ecosystem in which we live.

We have reviewed the current CWPP for the Lake Hodges area and would like to congratulate you on compiling a document that does a excellent job highlighting the important tasks needed to improve fire safety in the area. The document is the first we have seen in San Diego County that actually addresses the entire fire risk reduction equation instead of just focusing on the removal of native vegetation. This is an outstanding achievement and demonstrates how thoroughly the authors have investigated the subject and appreciate the complexities involved.

We would like to offer a few suggestions that will strengthen what you have already accomplished. Regarding clearance distances, the document states,

"To the greatest extent permitted by regulations and laws, establish and maintain the greatest possible clearances from structures and residences."

To avoid conflicts with best practices, we recommend this statement should emphasize "the most effective" rather than the "greatest." Science and practical experience have demonstrated that the "greatest" clearance distances are not necessarily the most effective way to protect property from wildfire or the best use of fuel reduction grant dollars.

The Prioritized Fuel Reduction Treatments section in Appendix B states,

"Clearance of all hazards along Lake Drive, north of Ash Lane and South of Via Rancho Parkway, including any over-hanging trees that restrict fire department access to the community."

This is the remarkable California oak canopy that is one of the keystone points of interest and beauty to the community. It exemplifies what Del Dios represents - a creative, rural settlement that values nature over structured, suburban gardens. The Council should take great care before considering modifying the canopy on Lake Drive. Because of the planning and position of Del Dios, the Fire Safe Council should recognize that to make the community completely fire safe, it would have to destroy the very character of the neighborhood itself. There are many things that can be done to reduce fire risk, but care should be taken while planning such actions to ensure Del Dios retains its unique setting and independent spirit.

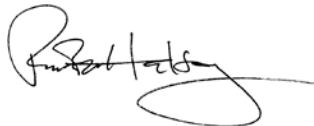
"City of Escondido and Rincon Fire District

- Reduction or removal of dangerous fuels on the hills above Lake Hodges along Mission Road where it connects the Community of Del Dios to the Lake Hodges Boat Launch Ramp. These fuels threaten adjacent uphill homes in the Rincon Fire District along Skyhawk Road, Vista de La Cresta, Purer Road, Lakeview Terrace, Vista de Oro and Via Loma Vista.

- Reduction or removal of dangerous fuels on and around Bernardo Mountain within the City of Escondido and the San Diego River Park that threaten adjacent homes in the Rincon Fire District along Via Conejo, Via Privada, Via Valle Vista, Via Loma Vista, Kershawn Place, Bernardo Mountain Road, Quiet Hills Farm Road, and in the City of Escondido in the Sage Glen / Quiet Hills Drive and Lomas Serenas developments."

Without clear distinctions concerning appropriate distances for vegetation management from structures (100 feet in most cases), the above description has the potential of encouraging actions that will violate state law, unnecessarily damage natural resources, and may actually increase fire risk by replacing native plant communities with flammable, invasive weeds. We encourage the Fire Safe Council to modify this section to reflect the excellent background found throughout the main portion of the document as well as state law in order to facilitate the use of fuel reduction grants where they will do the most good - directly around homes.

Thank you for a job well done,



Director
California Chaparral Institute