

Brush Management Meeting Notes

City of San Diego, Park and Recreation, Open Space Division (City)
University City Fire Safe Council (UCFSC)

Date: 9/7/2023

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Name	Affiliation	Name	Affiliation
Erika Ferreira	City of San Diego	Lou Rodolico	University City FSC (UCFSC)
Laura Ball	City of San Diego	Diane Ahern	University City FSC (UCFSC)
Mark Jennings	City of San Diego	Tom Cartier	University City FSC (UCFSC)
Marci Garcia	City of San Diego		

Introductions

Lou shared the 2003 Cedar Fire map with the fire details. Lou also presented the Merkel and Associates' (M&A) brush survey map and commented how Santa Ana winds conflagration along with University City limited vehicular egress issues exacerbate egress evacuation with dire circumstances similar to Maui. Originally planned access roads Governor to I-5 and the Regents Road Bridge were not installed making University City vulnerable by restricting westerly emergency egress.

Tom presented the City Very High Fire Hazard Zone (VHFHZ [LINK](#)) map along with the M&A survey map and noted during Santa Ana conditions fires will propagate North East to South West. This makes North East facing slopes in Rose Canyon more vulnerable for fire propagation. Both maps show similar locations along southern canyon rims that need trimming and pruning to create the required defensible space. Tom requested these areas be prioritized in the current City brush management schedule. The City asked if the areas are private or public. Tom responded that the areas of concern are in the public Open Space.

The City stated that the Open Space Division is responsible to maintain greater than 900 acres brush on City property. The City noted that the Marian Bear area has a high brush management priority.

The City identified the 22-month (brush management trimming and pruning) rotation schedule. City pre-walks are conducted for priority areas. More frequent brush management by others may be coordinated through a right of entry permit for off years (every other year, when brush management does not occur is an area). The City noted there have been some problems with contractors not properly trimming and pruning. This triggered a discussion into generating a plant list of invasive species (to be removed) and native plants (how they should be properly trimmed). The City does not want to share their plant list at this time but if the UCFSC hires a biologist to generate a plant list, the City will review it. Currently phone photo software allows plant identification. This is a great feature for homeowners who want to do their own brush management.

Lou noted that the Friends of Rose Canyon complained that some defensible space areas are not properly trimmed and pruned to remove invasive species and preserve indigenous vegetation and sensitive plant species.

The City noted that the City uses contractors, City crews, and nonprofits for brush management. Nonprofit groups must have Right of Entry (ROE) permits and proper training. Open Space work must be planned and coordinated in advance of entry onto City property.

Diane noted that as a resident who lives close to a canyon there is the perception that dense canyon vegetation creates a pathway for fire corridors and asked what can be done to mitigate the high brush density in canyons? The City responded that there are no plans to thin dense brush in Rose Canyon, while noting that the Open Space Division manages only Open Space areas within 100 feet of habitable structures, i.e. defensible space zones. All brush management activities must be implemented with the adopted City ordinances that include the 100-foot distance limitation from habitable structures. Multiple species conservation program (MSCP) is in effect outside the 100-foot defensible space zones.

Lou asked about how the City approached the state grant application process. The City responded that there are two City positions used for grant applications but there are limited City resources available to apply and administer grants. The City is aware of grant funding for reducing vegetation fire loads and will look into adding positions to pursue grant opportunities.

Tom asked how citizens should request that brush management activities be conducted in Open Space adjacent to their property. For example, how should the owner of a property that borders Open Space have the City trim, prune the 100-foot Open Space area adjacent to the home, and create required defensible space? The City responded that the mobile/smart phone "Get It Done" app is the best resource to make brush management requests. Citizens may also apply and obtain a Right Of Entry (ROE) permit and manage Open Space brush on their own.

Diane noted that one of the purposes of the M&A survey was to establish a baseline with the opportunity to re-survey and gauge brush management effectiveness. The UCFSC noted that it currently plans to conduct another biological survey this fall or early next spring to identify defensible space areas that need work. The UCFSC will look into other resources to help with brush management activities. Erika provided an overview of work that could be done in the off year that potentially could be funded by grants. The UCFSC plans to re-issue the 2021 the University City Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) with updated information. Diane noted that updates to the brush management and fuel reduction sections of the CWPP may offer the potential for special projects in partnership with the City.

We discussed how the UCFSC might best use current grant resources. The City suggested that planning for next year; an "off the rotation year," for University City could be initiated now. There are issues with having untrained personnel trim and prune Open Space brush because non-native and native plant species are trimmed and pruned differently. We discussed available training resources and determined that there may be a need for vegetation specific guidelines trimming and pruning brush. UCFSC agreed to consider using grant resources to have the biologist, (M&A) develop trimming and pruning guidelines and/or developing a list of native and invasive species. Any guidelines that involve activities in Open Space must be reviewed and approved by the City.

End of meeting notes.

PS: We appreciate the City taking time to meet with us and address our concerns!