

## **The Mount Wilson Fire Safe Council**

At the behest of the U. S. Forest Service and the L.A. County Fire Department, a meeting was held in March at the Angeles National Forest headquarters in Arcadia. All Mt. Wilson stakeholders were urged to attend. Extensive presentations were made by the Forest Service, the Fire Dept, L. A. County Dept. of Public Works, So. Cal. Edison and the California State Fire Safe Council. The meeting was well attended by representatives of the broadcasters, communication site users, the Mt. Wilson Observatory and Long Beach School's Camp Hi-Hill.

The major point was that the hazard from wildfire in the Mt. Wilson area has become extreme due to the heavy growth of vegetation with no burn-off in many years. Adding to the danger is weather conducive to wildfires spreading out of control and markedly increased activity at the site.

It was pointed out that recent fire seasons have had firefighting resources very strained. It could happen where Mt. Wilson would suffer delayed response, as emergency crews might have to come from outlying areas, should a fire occur after local crews have been deployed on other fires.

The agencies stressed the essential need for a coordinated, comprehensive effort among all the stakeholders and agencies to minimize the threat to life and property. Also the agencies involved need a single point of contact rather than having to try to round up a myriad group of site users, for planning and in event of an emergency. Recently there was an incident where emergency responders had a long delay in locating and accessing a building subject to an alarm.

Another point stressed is that when tough choices have to be made in regard to where limited resources are going to be sent, those locations seen to have worked to provide a fire resistant environment get priority. Not only as to where firefighters will make a stand but also where agencies will allocate preventive measures. Already as a result of the turnout at these early meetings L.A. County and the U. S. Forest Service has begun work to rehabilitate the toll road so it can be reopened for emergency evacuation.

Quickly the Mt. Wilson Fire Safe Council was formed by the stakeholders to address these needs. The council is incorporated as a California 501-c-3 not-for-profit organization. The council has elected a board of directors and a slate of officers. The council has established a mission statement, a code of conduct and a set of bylaws.

The purpose of this council is to preserve our natural and manmade resources by maintaining Mt. Wilson and the surrounding area as a fire safe environment by mobilizing and coordinating the Mt. Wilson Region stakeholders in a cohesive effort along with the U. S. Forest Service, the L. A. Co. Fire Dept and other agencies. The area of scope of the council is Camp High-Hill and Red Box on the north; Mt. Harvard on the south; The Mt. Wilson Observatory on the east and Mt. Disappointment on the west.

Several committees are actively at work toward achieving these goals:

- Establishment of a reliable communications system that will alert all personnel on the mountain at any hour in, event of a threat and eventual evacuation.

- Removal / thinning of vegetation on leasehold properties in accordance with LACoFD requirements.
- Develop and distribute safe evacuation plans.
- Evaluate potential safe Shelter-in-Place sites in event evacuation were to become impossible.
- Assessment of each site by advisors from the USFS and LACoFD to identify improvements that can make the sites more fire resistant.
- Assist all sites in installing “Knox Boxes” to aid emergency crew entry.
- Evaluate all water supplies as to quantity, reliability, location and connections. Distribute that information to emergency responders.
- Provide a visible cache of maps and site info for use of emergency crews which may respond from out of the area during time of strained local resources.
- Evaluate existing on-site fire suppression equipment, such as Indian tanks, portable pumps, hoses, mobile tanks, brush tools, etc.
- Encourage all stake holders to provide for as much self-help as reasonable.
- Training of Mt. Wilson personnel to safely fight a small outbreak and to know when to drop those efforts and escape.
- Apply for state and federal grants and other funding to finance these and other projects to mitigate the threat from wildfires.
- Provide continuing contact with local, state and federal agencies and representatives to encourage allocation of needed resources to the area. (Squeaky wheel, etc.)