

**CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
WILDLAND FIRE SUPPRESSION ASSESSMENT**

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OVERVIEW

1) Short summary of the Wildland Fire Suppression Benefit Assessment District

Due to their topography, climate, degree of combustible vegetation, and other wildland fire risks, properties in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones of the City of Santa Barbara high fire hazard area are at higher risk of damage from wildland fires. The Wildland Fire Suppression Benefit Assessment allows property owners within these high fire risk areas additional fire prevention services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires. These services include:

- Improvement of Evacuation Routes including clearing of excess vegetation
- Defensible Space Inspection and Assistance
- Vegetation Management –Reduction of hazardous vegetation

2) What is the history of wildfires in Santa Barbara County?

Many fires have occurred in the high fire risk areas of Santa Barbara County. Listed below are some of the major wildland fires that have occurred in Santa Barbara County since 1970:

Year	Fire Name	Acres	Homes Lost
1971	Romero Canyon Fire	14,538	4
1977	Sycamore Canyon Fire	805	234
1977	Hondo Canyon Fire	10,000	0
1979	Eagle Canyon Fire	4,530	5
1990	Painted Cave Fire	4,900	524
1993	Marre Fire	43,864	0
2002	Sudden Fire	7,160	0
2005	Gaviota Fire	7,440	1
2007	Zaca Fire	240,207	0
2008	Gap Fire	9445	0
2008	Tea Fire	1940	238
2009	Jesusita Fire	8733	80

3) What makes the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones more susceptible to wildfires than other places in the City?

There are several factors that make the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones at greater risk from wildfires. You can read more details about some of these hazards and risks in the City's Wildland Fire Plan.

- **Climate.** The climate consists of cool, moist winters and hot, dry summers that last well into the fall months. The low humidity and high summer temperatures increase the likelihood that if a fire starts in the area it will spread rapidly and be difficult to control.

- **Chaparral.** The Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zone has a significant accumulation of chaparral and chaparral mixed with landscape vegetation. When fires burn in this type of vegetation they burn hot and spread quickly.

- **Topography.** Periodic wind conditions known as “Sundowner” and “Santa Ana” winds interact with the steep slopes in the Santa Ynez Mountains and the ocean influence, resulting in an increase in the speed of the wind to severe levels. These two types of wind conditions increase the likelihood that fires will advance downslope towards the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones. In addition, these winds can greatly increase the rate at which a fire will spread.
- **Road Systems.** Some of the roads in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones do not meet Fire Department access and vegetation road clearance standards, and many are made even narrower due to encroachment of vegetation. In addition, many driveways are long and steep, posing a safety hazard. All of these factors make it more difficult and more hazardous for the Fire Department to provide fire suppression services in these areas.
- **Water Supply.** In the Extreme Foothill Zone, water supply is limited in some areas, and not available in others. These factors increase the risks associated with fires, due to the reduced availability of water to fight any fires that occur.
- **Fire Response Time.** Much of the Extreme Foothill Zone, and some of the Foothill Zone, is outside the City’s 4 minute Fire Department response time. As a result, fires in these areas may have more time to spread and to increase in severity before fire suppression equipment can arrive on the scene.
- **Proximity to the Los Padres National Forest.** The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) is a large forest to the north of the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones. The LPNF provides a great deal of potential fuel for any wildfire in the area. Wildfires that start in the LPNF have the potential to move south toward the Foothill and Extreme Foothill zones.

4) What determines which properties are included in the Assessment?

The high fire hazard areas included in the assessment were based on studies by the Santa Barbara Fire Department, as published in the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department Wildland Fire Plan, dated January 21, 2004 and adopted by City Council in May of 2004. The Fire Department completed a detailed analysis of our community, and made its determinations based on factors such as the topography, vegetation, road systems, and availability of water. All of the properties in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones are at higher risk of potential damage from a wildland fire than other areas in the City.

5) What is at risk if we have a wildland fire?

If there is a wildland fire in our community, we have the potential to lose our homes and businesses. Our lives, as well as the lives of our family, employees, customers, and guests are at risk. Our pets and our most beloved possessions such as irreplaceable photographs and heirlooms could be destroyed. In addition, the beauty of the local scenery could be severely damaged. In some areas, the potential for mudslides, flooding, and erosion are increased following a fire and heavy rainfall, where important ground cover has been burned away.

6) What is the effect of wildland fire on the air quality in our area?

All wildfires create smoke, which is made up of particles from the burned area. Based on the annual average acres burned by wildfire from 1985 to 1994, wildfire is causing the emission of almost 600,000 tons of air pollutants per year. Smoke can cause a health risk even in areas that are not burned. Children, the elderly, and other people who have certain health conditions such as lung disease and asthma can be particularly vulnerable to the effects of smoke from a wildfire.

7) What can we do to reduce wildfire risks?

We can reduce the severity and risk of wildfires by taking personal responsibility to create defensible space around our homes and other buildings, as well as by properly maintaining the vegetation along roadways and on undeveloped land. The assessment will help to reduce the wildfire risk by:

- Improvement of Evacuation Routes including clearing of excess vegetation
- Defensible Space Inspection and Assistance
- Vegetation Management –Reduction of hazardous vegetation

8) How will improving evacuation routes reduce my wildland fire risk?

The most important resources to save in the event of a wildland fire are your life and the lives of your family, employees, customers and guests. Did you know that three of the ten deadliest fires in U.S. history were forest fires? Improved evacuation routes will make it easier for you to evacuate quickly in the event of a wildfire. In addition, a fast and orderly evacuation will allow the Fire Department to dedicate its resources to fighting the fire, rather than splitting its attention between firefighting and evacuation assistance.

Improvement of evacuation routes in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones will be accomplished by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation that encroaches into our roadways or has the potential to burn along the roadway during a wildland fire. This will reduce the wildland fire risk by creating safe evacuation routes for residents. In addition, this will increase the safety of firefighting equipment that must quickly respond to the fire.

9) When will Sycamore Canyon Road be re-opened?

We understand that the closure of Sycamore Canyon Road is a concern to residents, and we would like to see it reopened. Unfortunately, this project is controlled by Caltrans and they have not committed to a date for reopening it. However, the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department is working with Caltrans to try to obtain at least limited access for wildland fire evacuation.

10) How will defensible space inspection and assistance reduce my wildland fire risk?

A wildfire sees your home as just another source of fuel. Defensible space creates a barrier between a wildland fire and your home or business, and, according to the Institute of Business and Home Safety, it can keep all but the most ferocious wildfires at bay. In addition, the defensible space around your home or business provides a safer area from which firefighters can battle an approaching wildfire, further increasing the probability that your property will be saved.

11) What is “defensible space?”

“Defensible space” is a perimeter created around a structure where vegetation is treated, cleared or reduced to slow the spread of wildfire towards a structure, reduce the chance of a structure fire burning to the surrounding area, and provides a safe perimeter for firefighters to protect a structure.

12) Won't the creation of defensible space ruin the beauty of my landscaping or reduce the privacy I enjoy on my property?

No. When done with the proper care, you can create defensible space without harming the aesthetics of your landscaping. In fact, one natural outcome of the creation of defensible space can be the enhancement of the visual quality of your landscaping through the removal of dead and unsightly vegetation and other flammable materials. In addition, trees and shrubs often can be trimmed in a way that adds to your defensible space without adversely impacting the privacy you enjoy on your property.

13) How will vegetation management reduce my wildland fire risk?

Vegetation which is dead, dry, or has other characteristics such as the flammable oils found in chaparral provides fuel which can increase the intensity of a wildfire, and can allow wildfires to spread. Where the presence of these fuels is reduced, it reduces the risk and severity of wildland fires.

Vegetation management areas were identified in the City Wildland Fire Plan. These areas consist of hillsides and canyon areas outside of a properties defensible space. These vegetation management areas pose a significant threat to homes and the surrounding community due to hazardous accumulations of vegetation. By reducing the amount of hazardous vegetation in these areas we can help reduce the intensity of a fire burning in the area, reduce the fires ability to spread and increase the opportunity to protect the surrounding structures and community.

14) I spend the time and money to cut back the excessive brush and vegetation on my property, but my neighbor doesn't. Will revenue from the assessment pay for maintenance in my neighbor's yard?

Revenue from the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment will be used to address vegetation that is encroaching on the public roadways we must use for evacuation, affecting the safety of everyone in our community. It will also promote the creation and maintenance of defensible space through an increased inspection program, and by providing assistance, such as chipping services, to help you and your neighbors in your efforts to protect your property from wildland fires.

ROLE OF THE CITY AND USE OF FUNDS

15) What is the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment and what is the role of the City?

The measure has been adopted by the Santa Barbara City Council to fund services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones of the City high fire hazard area

16) The City has a lot of money. Why isn't the assessment paid for out of the General Fund?

The City supports the Fire Department with money from the general fund to pay for services it provides to the general public. The assessment will not reduce the City's ongoing general fund commitment to the Fire Department. The purpose of the assessment is to provide additional, special wildland fire suppression services, over and above the general fire protection services already provided, to specifically reduce the severity and damage of wildland fires to property in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones of the City high fire hazard area.

17) How are assessment funds spent?

The funds are used to provide services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires, including:

- Improving evacuation routes for local residents through removal of vegetation from roads in the area;

- Providing chipping services to residents to help them dispose of excess vegetation
- Increased inspections and support to residents in the creation and maintenance of defensible space
- As funding allows, performing vegetation management projects on undeveloped land as identified in the City Wildland Fire Plan

18) Will any of this money go to the City, County, or State for other needs?

No. All money collected by the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment must be used for services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones.

19) What are the public accountability and fiscal controls?

The funds from the assessment are kept separate from other City funds. Public accountability and fiscal controls include the following:

- All the assessed funds raised are spent on services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones;
- Annual audits; and
- Annual public hearings and public reviews

GENERAL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

20) Why was the assessment decided by mailed ballot?

Proposition 218, the “Taxpayers Right to Vote On Taxes Act,” which was approved by voters in 1996 as an amendment to the California Constitution, requires a mailed ballot proceeding for any proposed new or increased assessment. The ballot proceeding was conducted according to the requirements established by Proposition 218. A ballot and a notice were mailed to all property owners who would be asked to pay the proposed Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment. The mailed ballot proceeding gave property owners the opportunity to vote on this proposed assessment.

21) What parcels are included in the Wildland Fire Suppression Benefit Assessment District?

All parcels in the highest fire risk areas in the City are included in the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District. These areas are called the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones. The areas included were based on studies by the City of Santa Barbara, as published in the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department Wildland Fire Plan, dated January 21, 2004

22) Are there any exemptions from the Wildland Fire Suppression Benefit Assessment?

No. By law, all parcels in the benefit area for the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment must be included. Also, the law does not allow exemptions or reductions for seniors or for other purposes. (These requirements are contained in Article XIID of the California Constitution and other laws governing benefit assessments).

23) Was there a public hearing on the proposed assessment?

A public hearing was held by the City of Santa Barbara City Council on June 20, 2006, commencing at 2:00 p.m. in the Santa Barbara City Council’s Chambers, located at 735 Anacapa Street, Santa Barbara, California 93101.

24) When were the results of the assessment ballot proceeding known?

Tabulation of the returned ballots commenced after the close of the public hearing (see above for details regarding the public hearing). Results of the tabulation were announced at the City Council meeting scheduled to commence at 2:00 p.m. on July 11, 2006, at the same location as the public hearing.

AMOUNT OF ASSESSMENT

25) How much is the assessment?

The assessment raised approximately \$216,281.07 for FY 2009-10 with 3490 parcels.

26) Assessment rates by property type and Zone.

The rates shown below for FY 2006-07 were determined based on the relative special benefit enjoyed by each type of property in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones. Please see below for more information about how these rates were determined.

Property Type	Foothill Zone		Extreme Foothill Zone	
	Rate	Unit	Rate	Unit
Single Family	\$65.00	each	\$80.60	each
Multi-Family	\$23.94	per unit	\$29.68	per unit
Commercial/Industrial	\$53.21	per acre	\$65.99	per acre
Office	\$45.88	per acre	\$56.89	per acre
Institutional	\$24.97	each	\$30.96	each
Storage	\$6.19	per acre	\$7.67	per acre
Agricultural	\$5.26	per acre	\$6.52	per acre
RangeLand	\$1.18	per acre	\$1.46	per acre
Vacant	\$2.11	each	\$2.61	each

27) Can the amount of the assessments be adjusted for inflation in future years?

The assessment can be continued annually based on a majority vote of the City Council. The assessment rate can be adjusted by an annual amount equal to the change in the Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County Area Consumer Price Index, not to exceed 4% per year. In the event that the annual change in the CPI exceeds 4%, any percentage change in excess of 4% can be cumulatively reserved and can be added to the annual change in the CPI for years in which the CPI change is less than 4%.

28) How long will the assessment last?

The assessment, which was initially proposed for the fiscal year 2006-07, may be continued on an annual basis with a majority vote of the Santa Barbara City Council.

29) What are the annual continuation requirements?

The annual assessment continuation process requires that a new Engineer’s Report and budget be prepared that lists the coming year’s expenditures and assessment. After the Engineer’s Report is prepared and preliminarily approved, the City must hold a public hearing prior to continuing the assessments.

30) How was the assessment determined?

The proposed assessment for each property is based on the estimated level of special benefit each property receives from the services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires to be funded by

the assessments. The types of special benefits include increased safety and protection of real property assets, enhanced safety and protection of health for residents, workers, customers, and guests, protection of views, scenery and other resource values; enhanced air quality; enhanced quality of life and desirability of the area; and specific enhancement of property values.

In order to determine the assessments, each property was assigned an estimated level of special benefit relative to a single family home. The method of benefit determination is based on the type of property, its location and its size. After the level of benefit for each property is estimated, the total cost of the services to reduce the severity and damage from wildland fires to be funded by the proposed assessments is allocated to each property based on the estimated special benefit received.

A most recent engineer's report describing the proposed services, method of assessment, budgets, benefits and proposed assessment for each parcel is available for review from the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department. Contact Ann Marx at (805) 564-5720.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information concerning the proposed Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment or this ballot proceeding, please call the Ann Marx of the City of Santa Barbara Fire Department at (805) 564-5720.