

FOUNTAINGROVE II GAZETTE

OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE ASSOCIATION



Volume VIII, Issue 1

Summer 2011

Fuel Reduction Efforts A Major Focus

The Open Space Maintenance Association was extremely busy last fall. The Design Program for managing Fountaingrove II open space dictates the procedures OSMA must follow, and major work in our open space wildlands must be performed during the “off-season” so as not to conflict with nesting birds. That means that the green light for us starts August 16th and ends February 14th.

To help with this undertaking, OSMA hired consultants. Urban Forestry Associates (UFA) are experts on forest management and fire behavior, and assisted us last year with our strategy for fuel reduction, habitat improvement and better forest health. Although the OSMA Board tries to make educated decisions on all our open space management issues, we have found that our knowledge base can only take us so far. The use of educated authorities as resources has proven invaluable.



Since last September, OSMA’s fuel reduction projects have been numerous. The first order of business was the removal of several dead or dying trees that were considered highly dangerous. They were located throughout Fountaingrove II, usually near homes or roads.

Next, the creation of a firebreak above the last house on Chanate, just above the interchange, was addressed. The area was rampant with Eucalyptus trees (highly pyrophytic), dead and dangerous Douglas-firs, invasive broom and other overgrown brush. We had all the Eucalyptus on our property removed. Dead trees were removed or left in place after limbing, and the limbs and brush were removed from the site. We’ll have to keep an eye on the tenacious Eucalyptus and the broom, as its

seeds last for years and its ability to re-grow after cutting to the ground is unmatched.

Continuing up Fountaingrove Parkway from the Chanate property, a large swath of chaparral growing behind the landscaped areas was fuel-reduced per UFA’s recommendation. The topography below Daybreak that drains towards the Brush Creek area is a natural funnel should a fire start from below. If that were to happen, the fire would swoop up toward the corner of the parkway and Daybreak, creating a whirling, ember-throwing tornado of fire that would send flaming brands in every direction. Keeping the brush level below the parkway lessens the opportunity for a fire to cross roads into new neighborhoods.

Another major fuel reduction area was the large open space island between Parker Hill and Crown Hill Roads and their cul-de-sacs. The area of fuel reduction encompassed just over five acres, mostly comprised of chaparral. Chaparral is a type of plant community consisting of mostly evergreen shrubs with few, if any, tall trees. The area was fuel-reduced by approximately 50%, relieving the area of all the dead brush and branches, cutting back the woody and mature Coyote Bush, Chamise and Sage while revealing some stunning large manzanita groves, gorgeous mossy rock outcroppings and thriving habitats, including a honeybee hive.

Also, the areas behind Rocky Knoll and Raycrest, along with the area behind Newbury Court were treated, where many dangerous trees were removed.

Other major projects are planned to begin this fall, all in an effort to make our forests healthy and safe.

Wildfire - California's Friend...Until We Came

Did you know that wildfire has always played a critical part California's healthy ecosystems? Fires were a natural and integral process throughout California's history, removing overgrowth and encouraging new plant growth, keeping rampant species in check while leaving strong, slow growing species, such as oaks, to thrive. Since humans have encroached on California's wildlands in growing numbers, fires have been suppressed for obvious reasons. That suppression, however, has created new problems.

When you look out the window and into our beautiful open space, what do you see? Densely spaced green trees and shrubs for as far as the eye can see? Actually, that's not a good thing. You may be surprised to learn that our forests are not in a healthy state. Those densely spaced trees and shrubs should not be so dense, as they all fight for a finite amount of water and nutrients.

Once, much of our open space was oak woodland. Many oaks still exist in our forests, but their numbers are dwindling. The invasive, opportunistic Douglas-fir is a major culprit. The Douglas-fir reseeds in ferocious numbers and grows at an incredible rate. Without wildfires to control its spread, it quickly surpasses the oaks in height, shading them from needed sunlight and stealing the soil's nutrients. Of course, nowadays the oaks must also contend with Sudden Oak Death among other threats (see page 7).

Part of OSMA's challenge as we move forward will be to reduce the Douglas-fir population, along with the overgrown and dead plant material (as fires once did) in order to improve our fire safety, which will benefit the forest's overall health. Too many trees and shrubs means too much competition, and that means all the trees suffer - including the Douglas-firs.

What's Killing the Trees?

As mentioned in the article above, wildfire always played a major role in California's wildland health. Now that our wildlands are vastly overgrown with brush and Douglas-firs competing for sunlight and nutrients, opportunity knocks for nasty bugs and diseases.

You may have noticed the tops of Douglas-firs dying back, quickly proceeding further and further down the tree. A dying treetop can signify the presence of bark beetles and/or pitch canker - an incurable fungus that is severely threatening many of California's conifer forests.

The OSMA hopes to be able to address some of these problems by thinning the Douglas-fir population for fire safety, thereby reducing stress on the trees, and by keeping an eye out for beetle infestations. Once a brood tree is established, it's rather easy for the beetles to spread rampantly from there, and the beetles are a vector for the pitch canker fungus.

Keep an eye on your own trees. Pitch canker symptoms - in addition to the dead treetops - include the appearance of a canker, discoloration of branches, trunk and exposed roots, and the flow of amber pitch running down the trunk.



Summit Update

It seems to be an old story, but the developer of the Summit development (Hansford and Newgate Courts) still has not completed its obligations to the City - nor to OSMA - and, therefore, OSMA cannot improve the strips of land along the parkway in that area along Fountain-grove Parkway. However, there is renewed hope that water meters will be installed and the terribly invasive broom will be removed in the not-too-distant future.

Two years ago, after planting over 165 trees and about 200 one-gallon plants, Creekbridge Homes put the entire project on hold without having installed the electricity or water hookups necessary to keep the plants thriving. Luckily, some of the oaks are still clinging to life, however, the entire area is now a mess of overgrown brush.

For three years OSMA has cut the weeds and grasses in the summer for fire safety, passing the bill along to Creekbridge.

It is our hope that soon the homeowners in the Summit will enjoy a completed and beautiful landscape!



Crime Update

Although home break-ins seem to have subsided, and the graffiti problem has lessened, there are always new problems that seem to emerge.

During the past year several homeowners experienced tire damage from trucks and SUVs that came over the sidewalk and drove over lawns and landscapes. It was a problem throughout Fountain-grove that seems to have ended for now.

Door-to-door scam artists may be on the rise. All solicitors must be permitted by the City of Santa Rosa. If you encounter a solicitor, make a point of only doing business with one who has been permitted. It's much easier to say "no" to a non-permitted, illegal solicitor.

As always, be on the lookout for any suspicious vehicles in your neighborhood, particularly at night. Since many of the streetlights have been de-energized, keep your yard well-lit. Adding motion-sensor lights might help.

Contact the police at the non-emergency number if you see something suspicious: 528-5222 or 543-3572.



Open Space Damage

Over the past year, the OSMA has found more than a few instances of open space damage caused by homeowners. The damage varies from "trying to be helpful" trimming of shrubs to absolute destruction of trees to enhance personal views or perhaps just for fun. Remember, your property ends at your property line. Your neighbor wouldn't appreciate your handiwork in their yard - and the OSMA doesn't appreciate it either. No trees are ever trimmed or removed to provide views. Period.

Another problem is the dumping of clippings or dead foliage from neighboring properties. Please keep your garden debris out of open space! North Bay Corp. is always happy to deliver another green debris container to you upon request. Please inform any hired gardeners of our policies.

No vehicles of any kind (bicycles, motor bikes, all-terrain vehicles) are allowed in our fragile open space. Please enjoy our wildlands on foot!

Fines for open space vandalism and/or dumping can range from hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars. Be a good neighbor. Respect our valuable open space.

Please, Please...Pick Up the Poop!

Please enjoy your walks with your furry friends, but along with a secure leash, always bring a bag or two. No one likes to see your dog's mess on the sidewalk or in the open space, and it's not a part of a healthy environment. Do your part!

Tree Stakes

Have you taken a good look at your yard lately? Is it possible that you've overlooked the removal of some old tree stakes? They're easy to miss – but your trees may be suffering. Check it out.

If you have a tree that has been staked for more than 3 years or it looks like the tree is supporting the stake, it's time to remove the entire post (they are imbedded with toxic chemicals). At the very least, make sure any twine is loose enough for the tree to bend in the wind.

New Fire Gates

Several of our open space access points have recently been updated with new fire gates or have been retrofitted so that the appropriate agencies have easy access when necessary.

The new gates are the correct width for fire equipment accessibility and the new lock mechanisms make sure that every key holder is guaranteed access when necessary.

Woodstock Toppled

Recently, late night hooligans pushed over our beloved Woodstock at Rincon Ridge Park. Damage looks to be minimal, and we hope the fixes are relatively easy. This is the first time the statue has been damaged. We hope it's the last.



New Website Up and Running

After years of using generous volunteers to develop and maintain the website for OSMA, the Board decided that the time had come to have one professionally developed so that ongoing maintenance and updates would be more streamlined and easily transferred to new generations of volunteers.

After speaking with several web professionals, the Board decided on Nu-Designs in Rohnert Park. Through several meetings the look, layout and content started to build, resulting in the website you see today. In addition, the address was altered to reflect our true name:

www.FountaingroveII.com.



If you're looking for whom to contact, specific information contained in OSMA documents, approved or prohibited plants, maps, fire safety information, volunteer opportunities, the next Board meeting, etc., you can probably find it here!

Speeding

In a hurry? Next time, please wake up sooner, leave the house earlier or just relax and enjoy the view. Speeding on our neighborhood streets is as dangerous as it is illegal. Please observe the 25 mph limit, particularly on Rincon Ridge and Parker Hill! And if there's a possibility that children or pets are out and about, an even slower pace is merited.

Nothing is more devastating than a careless accident that hurts or kills someone.

We Live in the Wilds

The tree pictured here is a scratching post. It's a mountain lion scratching post - and it's in our open space.

We often forget that we share our space with lots of wild animals. So, please only walk through the forest with a friend or dog (always on a leash), and bring your pets and their food inside at night.



What's an Ember Catcher?

The OSMA maintains an excellent series of firebreaks surrounding our homes, but nothing will contain flying hot embers as they blow with the fierce, dry winds in a fire. Most homes lost in a wildland fire do not go up in flames because the fire reaches their doorstep. The vast majority of homes burn because of a flying ember that lands in a highly flammable material alongside the home, such as a pyrophytic ember catcher. An ember catcher is a particular type of plant that can easily become a torch should a flying ember land within its structure. The plant may be beautifully green on the outside, but as you peer into the interior you find nothing but dry, twiggy, extremely combustible kindling.

The types of plants that merit this designation are usually small-needled or small-leaved, oily plants that are extremely combustible. Rosemary? Ember catcher! Cedar? Juniper? Lavender? Ember catchers! Italian Cypress? Super ember catcher! Just imagine an ember landing in an Italian Cypress next to your home. The plant becomes a torch, spreading fire under your eaves where exposed wood readily ignites your entire home. Take note: **Flame length and height will be at least 3 times the height of whatever is burning.**

Take a look at plants that are considered "safer" in a fire prone area. Make sure plants are spread apart into islands so that your landscape isn't one continuous mass that will fuel a fire's feeding frenzy. Green plants will burn! Green or brown, too much of any foliage without spacing in between will carry a fire straight to your doorstep! Remember: by City ordinance, all homeowners within a very high fire danger area must keep weeds trimmed to 4" or shorter from the beginning of fire season until the end (usually late October).



Douglas-Fir Seedlings Abound

The Douglas-fir holds many fond memories for those of us who grew up in California. It was (and still is) what most of us who celebrate Christmas admired in our living rooms as it glistened with shiny glass ornaments and sparkly tinsel. To the OSMA, however, it is an invasive opportunistic plant that reproduces like crazy, crowds out our native oaks and other desirable plants, and creates a significant fire hazard. The Douglas-fir has a place in our environment (it creates habitat, shade and provides food), but it has to be controlled. Too many seedlings create spindly kindling - never a healthy forest. If you find small seedlings in your yard, pull them out... unless their placement is perfect for a future 100 foot tree.



These Douglas-fir seedlings are too tightly spaced to ever become healthy trees, but are hazardous fuel in a fire.

What About Those CC&Rs?

If you've been paying attention, you know that the OSMA does **not** have anything to do with CC&R (Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions) issues, and that there are three different sets of CC&Rs within the FG II community. The OSMA does, however, lend space in the newsletter and website to the Architectural Review Committees (ARCs) - the entities that do deal with the CC&Rs. To date, the only area with an operating ARC is Fountaingrove II East. The ARC East recently enlisted the services of a security firm to monitor overnight street parking and basketball hoops. The West and Summit still have not assembled their Architectural Review Committees. The OSMA encourages the West and Summit to form their ARCs for the betterment of their neighborhoods.

A reminder for all of us: Overnight street parking is not permitted! The CC&Rs require that you park in your garage (not use it for storage). Additional vehicles may be parked in the driveway.

Habitat Trees

As part of our revised Design Program, our legal “how to” document with the City, OSMA must keep two dead trees – or habitat trees – per acre. Two habitat trees per acre may seem like a lot until you find out how important they are to a healthy forest. In order for OSMA to comply with this requirement, but also keep hikers and homeowners safe from falling branches, the trees have been “manicured.” Their long limbs have been shortened or removed and their height is lowered to lessen the threat of toppling.

Woodpeckers do great work carving out hollows for their own homes, but when they leave, many other animals happily take up residence. Here’s a list of just a few hollow-loving animals in our area: western bluebird, house wren, Bewick’s wren, white-breasted nuthatch, red-breasted nuthatch, oak titmouse, chestnut-backed chickadee, violet-green swallow, tree swallow, purple martin, ash-throated flycatcher, Pacific-slope flycatcher, red-breasted sapsucker, pileated woodpecker, Vaux’s swift, northern saw-whet owl, spotted owl, northern pygmy owl, western screech owl, barn owl, American kestrel, squirrels, bats, and the list goes on.

Many other species use dead trees for uses other than living quarters. They can be used for food storage, perches, and as food sources (insects).

Standing dead trees are important, but so are fallen ones. Trees on the ground become habitat for land-loving critters like rabbits, skunks, salamanders, frogs, lizards and others. And their slow decomposition replenishes nutrients back into the soil.

So, although their appearance may be unusual, the necessity of dead trees to the health of our wildlands means that many of them will be sticking around.



A native raptor utilizing one of our new habitat trees.

Landscape Committee

Check out our latest landscaping project along Parker Hill Road. It’s just part one of a two part undertaking. Volunteers Felis Domingues and DeeDee Bridges spent countless hours researching, designing, consulting and directing the entire project, and will do so again in the fall when the second half of project installation is completed.

All the plants specified on the project are California natives, many of which came from the OSMA propagation program – low maintenance, low water, high promise! They will blend seamlessly with the beautiful open space scenery that extends beyond its borders.

Other projects we’re looking forward to: landscape bark renewal, new landscaping on lower Crown Hill and lower Fountaingrove Parkway...and cross your fingers that the Summit will soon see progress!

Love Where You Live?

We are very lucky to be in such a wonderful area. Your \$58 monthly dues, however, doesn’t provide all that Fountaingrove II needs to keep this place running smoothly. It takes hundreds of volunteer hours to get all the work done. As has been said before, many hands make light work, and OSMA is always looking for volunteers! Be a sport and help make your neighborhood a better place to live. Contact Dennis Searles at dennis@bpfinance.com or 528-6636, or Kim Nielsen-Glynn at glynn@sonic.net or 544-7871 to find out where you can lend a hand!

Parks Maintenance

The OSMA Board and the City of Santa Rosa are drafting a proposal to maintain the wildland city park properties within Fountaingrove II. The proposal involves the OSMA providing weed abatement and open space maintenance for the city's wildland park areas (approximately 11 total acres) in exchange for a conservation preservation easement.



OSMA Treasurer Roy Thylin, City Parks Director Marc Richardson, OSMA President Dennis Searles

Given the recent budget cuts, the reality is that the required maintenance to make the parks open space fire-safe will not happen. This situation creates a fire safety issue for the residents of Fountaingrove II.

There are at least 50 homes adjacent to the park wildlands. The seriousness of the fire risk encouraged the Board to look at creative opportunities to protect the interests of the Fountaingrove II residents.

The objective of a mutually beneficial agreement between OSMA and the City is to protect the safety, density, habitat, and scenic beauty of the open space in Fountaingrove II parks. OSMA would manage the wildlands in the same manner as its own open space. The wildlands in the parks would be weed abated twice per year (OSMA trimmed the park grasses once this year based on a Letter of Intent from the City), treated for regrowth on a cyclical basis, and the trees managed for disease and safety. In return, as long as OSMA continues to perform this maintenance, OSMA would be granted a conservation preservation easement, protecting the property from any future development or sale.

The estimated cost to perform this work is less than 5% of the annual revenue budget of OSMA, and such action will not require a dues increase from its association members. The City Council soon will vote on the proposal.

Sudden Oak Death

Sudden Oak Death (SOD) is a tree disease that is killing some of the oaks in Sonoma County. We have it in Fountaingrove II open space. The disease is caused by the plant pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*, a water-loving fungus-like organism that produces plentiful spores in moist, humid conditions which may then be spread through wind-driven rain, water, plant material, or human activity. The spores spread from neighboring plants, such as California bay laurel trees, and enter the oak tree's vascular system through the bark or through pruning wounds. It kills the tree, although the tree may appear alive and healthy for up to 2 years, until suddenly, it turns brown and dies. It has no known cure.



Bay laurel leaves indicating the presence of SOD.

The following plants are known hosts for Sudden Oak Death: bay laurel, big leaf maple, madrone, manzanita, coffeeberry, camellia, rhododendron, coast and canyon live oaks, redwood, Douglas-fir, black oak, red oak, California buckeye, toyon, lilac, viburnum and many more.

The OSMA is trying to keep abreast of the latest information available. If you'd like to learn more about SOD, visit: www.suddenoakdeath.org for more information and photos of infected plants.

Got a Cell Phone?

If you use a cell phone in Sonoma County, please jot down this number: **565-2121**. It's the number you should dial when you need "911" in an emergency. When you dial 911 from your cell phone in Sonoma County, your call is directed (after more than a minute in many cases) to dispatch in Vallejo. Your call is then directed back to Sonoma County, wasting precious time. Do yourself a favor and direct dial the Sonoma County Emergency Dispatch and you'll get the help you need faster!

The Fountaingrove II Gazette

The Fountaingrove II Gazette is published by the Fountaingrove II OSMA. Any submission information/requests may be directed to the OSMA Board through its property management company:

Focus Real Estate & Investments, Inc.

3936 Mayette Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95405

Phone: 707-544-9443, email: focusre@sonic.net

Kim Nielsen-Glynn, Newsletter Editor, glynn@sonic.net

Stay Informed - Via Email

Be sure your name is on our email update list! Join the nearly 250 neighbors already receiving valuable information. You, too, can get timely and important neighborhood notifications. Your name and email address will not be shared with anyone else, and it will be hidden in group emails. Simply send an email with your name to: glynn@sonic.net and state that you wish to be on the email update list.

Contacts

See a problem? Illegal dumping, pruning or unauthorized use of open space?

A broken irrigation pipe?

Call us! Focus Real Estate & Investments at 544-9443.

Website Address: www.fountaingroveii.com

2011 OSMA Board

President, Dennis Searles

Vice President, Dan Cummins

Treasurer, Roy Thylin

Secretary, Kim Nielsen-Glynn

Member-at-Large, Bruce McConnell

OSMA Board meetings are usually held at 3:30 on the third Wednesday of the month at Focus Real Estate & Investments, 3936 Mayette Ave.

Call 544-9443 to confirm.

Save the Date:

Wednesday Evening, November 2nd, OSMA Annual Meeting / FireWise Meeting