

CREST/DEHESA/GRANITE HILLS/HARBISON CANYON

Minutes of the meeting on 10 February 2025, at Crest Community Clubhouse, 113 N Park Drive, El Cajon, CA 92021

A. ROLL CALL. Chair Ron Nehring called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM, and the roll call was conducted. Planning Group members Ulm, Nehring, Griffin, Bretz, Manning, Lutz-Partain, Geiger, and Lucas were present, forming a quorum of 8. Rich, Becker, Healy were excused. Seats 5, 11, 13 and 14 are vacant.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE (optional) . The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion made by Member Ulm to approve minutes of January 13, 2025. Motion assed (8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain)

D. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Kyle Hermann from Senator Brian Jones – Introduction and made himself a resource for our SPG Board. Supporting Fight for our Firefighters Bill to staff CalFire 365 days/yr

Matthew Phy (and interns) – Supervisor Anderson's office

Dave Richardson (Crest resident) requested to agendize getting a Rural Bus back to Crest

Member Geiger – cell phone towers on his property to manage defensible space and implement county regulations – asked attendees if anyone else had similar issues

E. ACTION ITEMS - *Discretionary projects, tasks, motions, proposals requiring a decision or vote*

- 1. Presentation by San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and CalFire concerning hazardous condition and wildfire threat posed by Stoneridge County Preserve** – Chair Nehring introduced and provided background on this item – 4 yrs ago the planning group formed a working group concerning wildfire threat mitigation and evacuation, where they had 3 yrs of meetings with stakeholders concerning Suncrest Truck Trail, evacuation and the conditions of public lands which resulted in the SPG approving 7 resolutions advising the County of San Diego concerning action to reduce wildfire risk and improve evacuation in Crest, Dehesa, Granite Hills and Harbison Canyon. Resolution 7 concerned the Stoneridge Preserve (240 acre site). CalFire - Ryan Silva, Deputy Chief-Community Risk Reduction and David Pietrczak, Battalion Chief) briefed on their work with DPR to reduction vegetation and not destroy the Preserve itself. DPR has already remove vegetation on the southeast side (100 ft) of the preserve that backs up to homes in Harbison Canyon. CalFire, working with San Miguel Fire & Rescue (CAPT Rich Durrell), DPR agreed to widen the fuels break up to 200 ft in areas that would be applicable. East side (Albar to Eucalyptus Park area) is already completed and they will start working on the southwest section clearing the existing the footprint that was previously done. CalFire also using their mini-excavators to clear Valley View Truck Trail (off Horsemill to Walmart). CalFire can not do defensible space inspections where they is no home on the property, requested CFSC to contact these parcel owners to reduce the vegetation on their properties to create a buffer on the top side of the preserve. Calfire will work with DPR to clear (but not widen) the small truck trail by Old Mountain View Road. Chief Pietrczak restated that this clearing will not stop a fire but will allow time for emergency crews to come in/out and residents to evacuate in a more safe manner.

Question by attendee – asked if this was a going to be regular maintenance or just once. Chief Pietrczak current fuel break is performed on a 2-3 yrs rotation and what they are doing now is just reopening up what was already done to maintain good clearance. CalFire des have a maintenance

plan, but due to more communities trying to build defensible space, they are getting overloaded with projects and the maintenance will get done depending on the availability of CalFire resources. With the Fire bill mentioned, if approved that will provide additional resources year around to assist with the mitigation of fuels.

Member Manning asked how fuels mitigation gets addressed – does the FSC need to request. Deputy Chief Silva responded that yes, they should contact him directly.

Vice Chair Lucas asked if equipment could widen/improve Valley View Truck Trail for evacuation. Chief Pietrczak responded that this TT and Suncrest TT were “mid-slope” (means they run across the middle of the slope and potential for extreme fire behavior). These TT should only be used for ingress/egress of emergency vehicles when other access roads are being used for evacuation. If these TT were to be used for evacuation, it will require 2-way traffic and there is no future plans to improve these for residential evacuation.

Chair Nehring asked Chief Pietrczak to provide a briefing on in the advent of an emergency what Crest residents should look for and where they should not go to and why. Chief Pietrczak responded to use the main roads for evacuation and use the emergency apps to provide an the evacuation route and Sheriff/CHP will provide information on road closures and most likely Crest residents will be using Mountain View and La Cresta. But in the advent there is no safe evacuation route and sheltering in place is not an option, the incident commander can choose to possible stop emergency vehicles from coming up and utilize Suncrest or Valley View TT as evacuation depending on the path of the fire.

Chair Nehring asked the consequence if someone starts heading down one of the TT. Chief Pietrczak responded that they evaluate these TT every year on their usage and what maintenance is required, but due to weather conditions could change and then become impassable for 2-wheeled vehicles, animal trailers, motor homes and the consequences could be great since these are single lane roads and now everyone is stuck and the impending fire could be coming or now emergency vehicles can not pass to get to the fire. Essentially consequences could be very great if residents decide on their own to take these TTs to evacuation.

Member Griffin asked if the current fuels mitigation at Stoneridge was a one-and-done. Chief Pietrczak responded that it is more of a higher level conversation and that Calfire has provided resources to do the initial work, but as far as maintenance plan will be an agreement between DPR and CalFire, probably be about every 3 years.

Chief Pietrczak mentioned they are looking at sites to increase their crews to handle all the fuels reduction requirements in this area and up to Ramona if necessary.

Carl McCullough (Regional Manager, DPR) thanked CalFire for their support/expertise at the Stoneridge Preserve because with their current manpower DPR couldn't maintain the fuels mitigation.

Attendee asked regarding the Crest Ecological Reserve and why Lakeview Trail and Cross Timbers Trail is not being maintained. Chief Pietrczak responded that SDGE since it was a utility road and if it is maintenance for emergency vehicles ingress/egress, CalFire will not address unless it is contiguous with other projects they have going on. Attendee requested who to contact to clear trails. Chief Pietrczak – if it is on the Preserve/protected area, unless there is a need or a request from community/FSC/etc to address.

Attendee mentioned that the resource management plan when the reserve converted to open space indicated they will allow fire breaks and fuels mitigation. Chief Pietrczak responded that they have all the legal processes taken care of and just wanted to get public support and provide information.

Attendee asked about the property coming up the La Cresta below the mobile home park and her concern about the overgrowth of vegetation and structure fire on Hamlet. Chair Nehring asked Rich Durrell, Division Chief Operations SMFR to respond – he responded that SMFR does not have the funding/resources so will work with CalFire to address. There is not one thing that will fix it all, SMFR is working with the State. SMFR helps with wildland fires but it is SRA (State Responsibility Area - CalFire), ground and bushes and SMFR hardening of the homes. Chief Durrell recommended adding Genasys Protect app as a tool for all residents to maintain awareness. It's a balancing act with the limited amount of funding/resources and things will get better.

Attendee asked if there was a CERT Training Program in Crest. Chief Durrell responded we are teaming up with San Diego County to extend the area to East County.

Attendee asked CalFire where on the map where the additional 100ft of fuels mitigation closer to Harbinson would be @ Stoneridge. They indicated because of steep topography of the area they have to be careful due to taking out too much and causing mudslides. They spoke with homeowners, stay out of the drainages, but they found spots where it was not too steep to mitigate fuels. Attendee then asked about along Mountain View where it turns into Frances (ravine) can they do 200 ft. Calfire response was no because it is a Preserve, but assured County Board of Supervisors about 2 yrs ago decided to do a 20ft roadside clearance program and found the primary evacuation corridors and worked with the County FSC and is on a yearly maintenance program.

Member Griffin asked if residents fence is within the 20ft clearance and do you approach them? CalFire response was they do not do the maintenance or approach the resident.

Kandhy Franklin-Collins would like to improve the communication between CFSC and CalFire in the sense that CFSC will contact residents/owners.

Chair Nehring asked them to summarize what actions have been committed to and are underway or about underway and then what is under discussion so we have a clear understanding of what is coming and what is being discussed as a possibility concerning Stoneridge Preserve. Chief Sylva addressed defensible space inspections – 5 positions funded by county and 3 positions funded by state a total of 8 defensible space inspectors for San Diego County Fire Protection District. They will be looking at homes surrounding Stoneridge Preserve and if they are in compliance will permit its own fuel break. They are currently hiring there DSI in March. He recommended residents get involved with FSC so we can work together for education and community outreach. Also download the Genasys Protect app. CalFire will start working with DPR to start cutting on the Harbinson Canyon side. Some of the crews were laid off, but can work year round if funding is approved. The 20ft road clearance will be brought back up on the maintenance cycle. The topside by the ridgeline near Old Mountain View Road will get cleared up. Chair Nehring asked the benefit of the clearing up, could slow down a slow moving fire. Chief Pietrczak added if planes are putting down retardant, they would prefer to have something that backs it up and the cleared area will do that and increase the effectiveness. Chief Sylva asked that the CFSC to reach out owners so CalFire could assist in clearing these parcels and look for opportunities. Kandhy said that CFSC will work with other FSCs to get that information.

Attendee asked what is the status of Suncrest TT being an evacuation route. Chair Nehring responded that the planning group has approved a resolution to make that road a 24/7 365 all weather condition available at the discretion of the incident commander and that is not where the condition is now. We have been pursuing through the County voluntary easements since the entire road is private and the planning group has been encouraging property owners along the road Suncrest Truck Trail to sign on to a voluntary easement to allow for more improvements. Most have signed, but not all. Calfire responded they have committed to maintain STT as a usable road for them and if we need to send residents down that road. They will never call it an evacuation road in the condition it is in, it is considered an emergency route specifically designed for resources to access Crest to defend life/property. There may be an event where the incident commander feels the need to send residents down that road. Calfire said they would have to go through a legal process with a multitude of forms to get permissions from owners to gain access and also to perform the work. Property owners do not want to improve the road due to possible use of multiple others misusing their property. The parcel line goes down the middle of the road and if they can get property owners on one contiguous side it may be possible, then they could use both sides, but has not happened. Chair Nehring mentioned that since planning group has been working on this they were able to increase the number of owners that would sign the voluntary easement, but do not have contiguous properties from one end to the others. Once we have contiguous properties that opens the door to make improvements. The County will have to look at alternates to have STT be an acceptable evacuation route along with La Cresta. Chief Pietrczak said best case for STT would be a 2-lane road, guardrails, turn-outs, paved – so even if we get the permissions it will be a major project to get to that best scenario. Attendee then asked if incident commander needed to get the various owners approval to use STT as evacuation. Chief Pietrczak said no.

Attendee asked if Calfire was basing their clearing/escape routes on the 2003 fire path. Chief Pietrczak replied yes, even though the winds can come from east or west, but Crest is on a mountain top so the fire can be slope driven and can come from all sides. Chief Pietrczak said with the fire breaks that we have now, we have a much higher percentage for survivability.

Kathy Fiedor asked why Calfire can put a fire break on the Harbison Canyon side of the preserve but not on the west side (Crest). Chief Ryan responded that if there is a structure fire in Harbison Canyon, the 100ft fuel break will limit the fire from going into the preserve and go up the hill. Chief Pietrczak replied that high percentage of fires are human caused and all the houses lined up on the Harbison Canyon side would be a potential for human cause and create the break before it gets to the preserve.

Janya Humphrey asked if thinning the brush in the entire preserve help mitigate the fire spreading. Chief Pietrczak said since that was in the preserve that was out of his realm and residents would have to address it with DPR. Crystal Benham from DPR said it was part of their multiple species conservation program and tied to a permit that they have to where they are required to conserve a certain amount of land for species to maintain the advocacy of the permit and in order to do what Janya was talking about DPR would have to pull the preserve out of the multiple species conservation program and replace the land somewhere else because the habitat would be destroyed in a way that DPR could no longer meet the terms of the permit. Janya then asked if there was a way we could clear the brush without destroying the habitat and the species but also creating the fuels mitigation, and referenced the Palisades fire and how government agencies need to start looking at things differently. Chief Pietrczak replied that habitats are cyclical and there are times when they can not do any clearing and makes it very difficult to clear and still manage the appropriate habitat. Janya replied that when we have a fire everything is going to burn up. Chief Pietrczak replied that they are managing the high priority sections and will work on others as time permits, @ Stoneridge and throughout the County.

Their priority is to keep it from starting and the next step will be Calfire to start defensible space inspections and start citing residents. Janya asked if fire pre-treatment (retardant) is being considered for Stoneridge. Chief Pietrczak replied that there are some areas in San Diego County using this on certain areas, mostly for roadside clearance where they can't cut, but does not know of any plans to expand. Chief Sylva said the retardant is very expensive and only lasts for 6 months or 3-4 inches of rain, very low return on investment. Chief Pietrczak and mentioned does not work as well in brush as it does on grassy areas. Janya asked DPR has anything been established on procedures and locations on the maintenance plans and being tracked. Carl McCullough, DPR responded that Calfire has assisted with the work on the Harbison Canyon side to fill in the gaps that hasn't been mitigated to create the fire break along the whole area where the structures are. Janya then asked why work hasn't been completed IAW the established Resource Management Plan and concerned if there is no plans or tracking. Carl McCullough responded that now with CalFire assistance they believe they will be able to meet the RMP with Calfire availability.

Closing comments from Chief Sylva, plug for IBHS (Institute for Business & Home Safety - <https://ibhs.org/residential/>) and launched this program. The Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) is an *independent*, 501(c)(3) nonprofit scientific research and communications organization supported by property insurers, reinsurers, and affiliated companies. IBHS's building safety research leads to real-world solutions for home and business owners, helping to create more resilient communities. Deer Springs is pilot for "wildfire preferred home". They are pushing this program on social media – residents can request an inspector to tell residents on they can make their home better to qualify to be with these insurance companies. Costs \$125 for the inspection to IBHS.

1.a. Resolution Calling for Increased Fuel Reduction, Fire Breaks, Controlled Burns, plus CEQA reform to Mitigate Wildfire Risk in Rural San Diego County. Motion made by Member Griffin to approve this resolution 2025-1.

Discussion: Member Bretz has an amendment to include "or modify". Vice Chair Lucas asked for clarification Amendment or Modify. Chair Nehring replied modified. Motion approved (8 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Group urges the County of San Diego to formally request that the State of California lift or modify CEQA restrictions on all fuel reduction, fire break establishment, and controlled burns when deemed essential by the local CalFire Chief or agency, ensuring that wildfire mitigation efforts are not delayed by unnecessary regulatory barriers.

2. Adoption of capital improvement and maintenance projects for county-maintained areas. This agenda item will be moved for discussion/action to the 10 March 2025 meeting.

F. GROUP BUSINESS - Reports, updates, announcements, administrative discussions

1. Announcements and Correspondence Received. Nothing to report

2. Discussion

a. Presentation concerning Firewise USA program in the subregion – Chair Nehring introduced this agenda item – what is a FIREWISE USA site, why do we care and the benefit and what is the status.

Janya Humphrey and Diana Griffin presented info on steps they took to get certified under the Firewise USA program for the pilot of 31 residents in Crest Northeast boundary. Firewise USA program is a certi-

fication program through the National Fire Protection Association. The purpose of the Firewise program is to develop strategies and provide simple effective steps to help communities reduce the risk of destruction from wildfire. This program offers a structured approach for communities to enhance their wildfire resilience, promotes collaborative efforts among residents and local fire & emergency agencies to strengthen the fire resistance of homes and surroundings. We initially started researching because lots of residents were losing their fire insurance or rates increased substantially. California passed “Safer by Wildfire” legislation that requires all insurance companies to offer a discount to Firewise certified communities. Plans to expand to all of North Crest and South Crest. We are collaborating with CFSC to secure grants to assist residents for their mitigation. The resident requirement is to provide 1 hour annually for Zone 0 to Zone 3 fuels reduction (defensible space) and structural hardening. California Fair Plan provides the discount also. Minimum number for Firewise boundary is 8 contiguous parcels. For people who are interested in participating can contact Janya Humphrey @ crestnortheast-fw@yahoo.com or Diana Griffin @ queenieglass@gmail.com for South Crest. Member Manning asked if we were going to provide inspectors for residents so they know what to do. Member Griffin replied not at this time but we have a plethora of literature and education materials available, including the Home Assessment Program from the San Diego County Fire Safe Council. The hardest part was filling out the application with assistance with San Miguel Fire & Rescue and Thomas Shoots and Shawn Arnold (Calfire) and Jason McBroom (Alpine Fire).

- b. Zoning and code compliance issues concerning ADU’s** – Member Ulm addressed the home on Horsemill trying to get a permit for tiny home with above ground septic. Waiting to hear back from Zoning enforcement.
- c. Community plan, fire resolutions and related actions update** – Nothing else to report
- d. Consideration of applicant(s) to fill vacancies for Seats 5, 11, 13 and 14.** – Nathan XXXXX from Harbison Canyon will submit his application.

3. Meeting updates.

- a. Reports on and upcoming BOS, PC and other Hearings/Meetings.** – Nothing to report
- b. Chairman’s/Vice Chairman’s Report** – Vice Chair Lucas requested review of the formatting of minutes and also requested if County could provide microphone for big meetings so everyone can hear what is being said
- c. Member reports**

Member Griffin – announced a few events: 8 March from 10-12 SMFR new brush engine ceremony @ Crest School. 20 March @ the Crest Community Association mtg @ 6:30 Sharon Smith from the Dept of Insurance will do a presentation on recent updates regarding home insurance, 22 March from 8-12 will be Crest Clean-up/Chipping event funding from Sunrise Powerlink Fire Mitigation Community Grant, 19 April from 9-1 – 4 Phases of a Disaster sponsored by CERT at the Alpine Library (must register), 19 April – 2025 Prepare in a Year @ Harbison Canyon Fire Station.

Chair Nehring announced at the 10 March meeting, the rep on the Grossmont High School District and insurance agent Jim Kelly will be there to address your questions regarding homeowners insurance.

Member Griffin also presented information regarding the Executive Order N-18-25 signed by Gov Newsom on 2/7 requiring the expedited implementation of Zone 0 (0-5 feet from your home) fuels reduction starting 1 Jan 2026.

d. Next meeting date Monday, March 10, 6:30 PM at Crest Community Association Clubhouse

G. ADJOURNMENT. Member Lutz-Partain moved to adjournment at 8:27 PM. The motion passed unanimously (8 yes; 0 no; 0 abstain)

Respectfully submitted, Diana M Griffin (Secretary)