

# **Firewise Council of Southwest Colorado Bi-Monthly Meeting**

## **Educational In-Service**

### **Tuesday, March 25, 2008**

**Location: La Plata Electric Board Room in BoDo Park, 45 Stewart Street**

### **Minutes of the Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 4:30

#### **Present were:**

Bob Koenig (Mesa Vista Estates), John Van Schaik (Deer Valley), Jon Callender (Kernan Ck. Ranch), Archie Hanson (Indian Camp Ranch), Russ Sweezy (Indian Camp Ranch), Craig Goodell (San Juan Public Lands), Jigger Staby (Shenandoah HOA), Ben Cordova (LPEA), Jack Cannon (Enchanted Forest), Dave Abercrombie (DFRA), Pat Rohen (Southwest Conservation Corps), J.T. Coyne (Vista De Oro), Amy McClintock (Turtle Lake Co. Rd 225), Mike Kane (Fire Ready), Ron Atkinson (Rafters J), Chris Judson (Wilderness Lake), Linda Baerthel (Wilderness Lake), Dick Norton (Taylor Ranch), Kathy Phelps (Durango West 1), Philip Walters (Elk Stream Ranch), Gary Rottman (Shenandoah Highlands), Cherry Miloe (Forest Lakes), Anne Schrier (Forest Lakes), Kent Grant (Col. State Forest Service), Marsha Porter-Norton (Firewise Neighborhood Ambassador Program Coordinator).

#### **Ambassador Program Updates:**

Marsha noted that a representative of our Firewise Council had been invited to attend and speak at the Backyard and Beyond Conference to be held Nov. 6-8 in Tampa, Florida. This meeting is sponsored by the National Firewise Organization. Marsha reviewed the history and purpose of the Conference. It was noted that Joy Mathis had attended the same conference in Denver two years ago and found it very informative. Joy also found that it would take two attendees to cover the presentations adequately. It was proposed that Marsha and J.T. Coyne attend. Both noted their intention to do so.

#### **Neighborhood Cleanup days:**

Marsha reviewed the Neighborhood Cleanup Days program sponsored by the Firewise Council Ambassador Program, Southwest Conservation Corps and Supported by Fire Ready, Inc. There have been three applications so far. There is room for one more. The deadline for application is April first. The work must be completed by August. Contact Erin Thomas at the SCC (phone: 970-259-8607 X 9).

#### **Program Sustainability and fundraising:**

Marsha noted that \$2450 had been raised to date. Marsha asked for volunteers to solicit program sponsors for donations. An ad hoc sustainability committee was created made up of J. T. Coyne, Dave Abercrombie and Jigger Staby.

#### **Other updates:**

Archie Hanson passed around his copy of his Preparedness Guide which can be found at [www.areyouprepared.com](http://www.areyouprepared.com)

#### **Approval of minutes:**

The minutes of the January, 2008 meeting were approved.

#### **New member:**

Patrick Rohen of the Southwest Conservation Corps was approved as a new member of the Council

#### **Spring Wildfire Prevention Month:**

May is wildfire prevention month. Through a contract with SJMA (San Juan Mountains Association), Marsha will be coordinating publicity and education efforts. Marsha provided examples of the ad which was placed in the Durango Herald. Newcomers' Guide which went out to 11,000 people. Copies can be obtained for use in newsletters etc. Email Marsha at [porternorton@animas.net](mailto:porternorton@animas.net). A similar ad will go to the Pagosa Preview. Marsha will provide newspaper websites/emails to use for sending letters to editors.

Various attendees agreed to keep track of letters to editors at Mancos, Pine River Times, and Cortez Journal.

Jigger suggested the council could contact County Commissioners and/or City Councilors and possibly have May declared something like "Fire Awareness and Education Month". There will be many things happening during May, and Ambassadors were encouraged to kick off their educational and publicity efforts during this time.

#### **House Bill 08-1110:**

Bob Koenig reviewed the letters sent to Ellen Roberts and Jim Isgar. Our concern about the lack of monetary incentive was noted. Ellen's interested response was noted as was her comment that the little monetary incentive was probably due to the current state finances and the low chance of the bill passing if the incentive were higher. Our response to Ellen's question "would we prefer nothing over this bill" was described as neutral, noting that we do not oppose the bill but we raised our points in hopes the bill can be passed with the improvements we suggest.

This led to discussion about how to get neighbors to mitigate. It was noted that Montezuma Co has implemented wildfire land use codes and La Plata Co. has passed a code but the details of implementing it are still being worked out by County officials. It was also noted that the most effective role for the ambassador is education. Dave Abercrombie also emphasized education.

**Getting the message out as to how many fires actually do occur in the area, and other communication efforts:**

There was much discussion around how to get the message out that there are many more fires responded to than is generally known. A regular column in the Herald such as Bear Tracker was suggested. Dave Abercrombie said he would look into how DFRA could make that information available. Craig Goodell suggested the information could readily be provided by The Durango Interagency Fire Dispatch Center.

Jigger, as member of the Sustainability Committee suggested contacting the Herald considering a look into a regular Herald contact. Contacting the Daily Telegraph was also suggested. Having the Herald and Telegraph do a series of articles was also suggested. It was suggested we talk to Butch Knowlton about a Herald contact.

Joy suggested having Jim Dyer of Durango Community Access Television interview the Council.

KSUT won state awards recently and Victor Locke received one for his April 2007 series on wildfire. A thank you letter to Victor was recommended.

#### **Committee chairpersons and committee updates:**

Bob Koenig emphasized the practicality of each committee designating a chairperson for general communication purposes and a review of primary committee activities at each bi-monthly meeting.

Committee Members are:

<u>Education:</u>	<u>Mitigation</u>	<u>Ambassador</u>	<u>Executive</u>
J.T. Coyne	Jack Cannon	Jigger Staby	Marsha Porter-Norton
Benny Cordova	Cherry Miloe	Marsha Porter-Norton	Susan Bryson (ex officio)
John Van Schaik	Anne Schrier	Bob Koenig	Les Kole
Joy Mathis	Archie Hanson	Jack Cannon	J.D. Burke
J.D. Burke	Mike Kane		
Lezlie Melton			

Each committee was encouraged to appoint a chairperson or recorder, identify one of two key actions to complete in 2008 and report on those activity at our regular meetings

#### **Grants:**

Craig Goodell noted that there are \$36,000 available in grants.

The Rural Fire Authority grant has a deadline of the end of March

The Community Wildlands Fire Assistance grant will open in mid April.

More information on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)

Kent Grant noted the Colorado Wildland-Urban Interface grant. [csfsdugo@lamar.colostate.edu](mailto:csfsdugo@lamar.colostate.edu)

Marsha agreed to send out a survey asking what HOAs are doing in the issue of enforcing wildfire mitigation in their covenants and HOA rules.

#### **In-service on Neighborhood Evacuation Plans:**

Butch Knowlton and Capt. Doug Hanna (La Plata Co. Sheriff's Dept) described experiences associated with evacuation. Butch and Doug both encouraged involvement of Ambassadors in the process of developing neighborhood-specific evacuation plans. Butch said that any Ambassador can call his office for assistance in developing an evacuation plan, and, he also said that the process should also include the Sheriff's office (has statutory authority for evacuation in Colorado) and the local fire department. It is important, both speakers said, to inform/educate residents of the any evacuation plan that is developed and also, plans can change on a moment's notice due to the nature of wildfire. Thus, alternatives and contingency plans need to be considered and written into the neighborhood evacuation plans. Communication and education were emphasized several times. A problem in recent California wildfires was that communities had evacuation plans but no contingencies. In one instance, there were actually more fatalities due to homeowners evacuating than from the wildfires. During an evacuation, it is found that many homes can be saved, however the homeowner needs to have the facility and knowledge to protect him/her self. The subject of "sheltering in place" is being used in Australia but not yet here in the United States. Butch stated that overuse of cell phones during an emergency (such as what happened during Durango's downtown fire) actually clogs the cell tower infrastructure and makes it difficult for emergency responders to use their cell phones.

Butch stated that he would welcome any localized information about a subdivision if a wildfire is happening such as where disabled persons might reside, etc. Marsha reminded everyone that as per the Firewise Council's policies, Ambassadors must evacuate with everyone else and go to a shelter if one is established. From this shelter location, the Ambassador might be contacted by someone involved fighting the wildfire for more information. An action item was developed through which Butch will be invited to meet with the Members of the Firewise Council to see if mutually agreed upon strategies can be found for keeping everyone safe while allowing emergency responders to get vital information during a wildfire. It was stated that Ambassadors cannot be in the actual command center set up near a wildfire or in an evacuated area. Ambassadors inquired about what to do with information they collect about their neighborhoods (e.g., pets, persons who are disabled, etc.). Ideally, this information is inputted into Red Zone and used during a wildfire. Also, this information should be kept in a safe place and taken out of an evacuated area for potential use by those fighting the fire. Several Ambassadors gave examples of strategies they are using to deal with evacuation. The bottom-line, it was acknowledged, is that evacuating from a wildfire is a chaotic process and experience. Pre-planning, communication and education can help the process go more smoothly.

#### **Next Meeting:**

The next bi-monthly meeting will be May 27<sup>th</sup> at 4:40 at LPEA Boardroom.