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19. Calabasas Interface Community Fire Safety Action Plan¹

19.1. Calabasas Interface Description

This planning unit includes the wildland-urban interface neighborhoods of the incorporated City of Calabasas. The Calabasas Interface unit extends from east of Los Angeles County Highway N1 (Las Virgenes Canyon/Malibu Canyon Road) to the eastern city boundary near Mulholland Drive and Mulholland Highway. The northern boundary is the Ventura Freeway (101). The southern boundary is the City of Calabasas boundary near Mulholland Highway. The Calabasas Interface Planning Unit is 7.1 square miles in area. The Calabasas communities of Las Virgenes Road and Brents Junction are included in Planning Unit 18, not this unit.

Assets at risk in the built environment include more than 3,000 single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums, apartments, and mobile homes. Also in the unit are state conservancy lands, Los Angeles County Fire Station #68, a grocer, landscaping plant nursery, gas station, Jewish community center, private land trust offices, natural lands interpretive center, golf course and country club, two preschools, four elementary schools, a middle school, high



school, private K–12 school, municipal library, mobile home park, an organic farm, a retirement compound, private mental health treatment center, residential facility for Alzheimer’s patients, tennis and swim center, children’s learning center, recreation center, several historic buildings, artificial lakes, three automobile dealerships, several eateries, two shopping centers, and several commercial, business, or personal services enterprises.

Single-family home prices in the area currently start at \$448,000 and go up to \$12.5 million. Condominium and townhouse prices range from \$199,000 to \$950,000. Mobile homes run \$35,000 to \$325,000. Undeveloped land price ranges from \$520,000 to \$1.7 million per acre.²

19.1.1. Calabasas Interface Wildfire Environment

Development in the Calabasas Interface unit is surrounded by open space and high habitat values in the southern, western, and riparian areas. The built environment is highly disturbed and vegetated with *ruderal* (among the first plant species to colonize disturbed areas), invasive, non-native, and ornamental species. All subdivisions are densely designed with multiple units per acre.³ The oldest subdivisions in the unit, Calabasas Highlands and Calabasas Village Mobile Estates, are located in the Mulholland Corridor. These two areas have dense, mature, ornamental vegetation. Newer subdivisions generally are landscaped with neo-tropical plants such as palms and bougainvillea. The development and landscaping of Calabasas is compact, with interspersed pocket parks and open space. City Ordinance D was passed in 2005 to save and protect remaining open space. It specifies that any change in zoning from open space requires a two-thirds concurrence of voters.⁴ The environment includes several important ecological

¹ This document was written by Julie Clark De Blasio, Principal of Sweetgrass Environmental Consulting, in conjunction with ForEverGreen Forestry.

² Rodeo Realty, The Zabner Group, “Calabasas real estate,” www.calabasas-real-estate.com (accessed March 10, 2010).

³ City of Calabasas (August 30, 2006), Zoning Map.

⁴ League of Women Voters, Education Fund (2006), Measure D, In “Directory of Los Angeles County, California measures,” www.smartvoter.org/2005/CA/LA/meas.

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attributes: live oak woodland, valley oak savannah, remnant California walnut woodland, southern willow scrub, riparian and wetlands habitat, pristine coastal sage scrub, and several sensitive plant, animal, and invertebrate species.⁵

Passive recreational opportunities include walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling, mountain biking, bird watching, and wildflower/wildlife viewing. Developed and private types include swimming, golf, court sports, and exercise classes.

Ingress and egress is from US Highway 101 (Ventura Freeway) to the north, and Los Angeles County Highway N1 (Malibu Canyon Road) to the west. Valley Circle Drive is to the east. Mulholland Highway is south. Streets are well-maintained with modern improvements such as shoulders, parking, curbs, lights, and some sidewalks.

CAL FIRE designated the entire Santa Monica Mountains region as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, including this area.

The Calabasas Interface Planning Unit has a history of wildfires: Calabasas (1903); Cooper #1 (October 1, 1927); 15,000-acre Woodland Hills #65 (November 6, 1943) with 150 homes destroyed in the burn area; McCoy #36 (July 15, 1944); unnamed (August 1, 1955); unnamed (July 10, 1958); 18,000-acre Liberty (November 28, 1958) with more than 100 homes destroyed in the burn area; Junction (October 28, 1967); 28,201-acre Wright (September 25, 1970) with 403 homes destroyed in the burn area and ten fatalities; Golf Course (September 27, 1970); unnamed (July 2, 1977); Highlands (September 7, 1982); 43,090-acre Dayton (October 9, 1982) with 74 homes destroyed in the burn area; Gun (May 30, 1984); unnamed (June 25, 1990); 17,000-acre Old Topanga (November 2, 1993) with 400 homes destroyed and three fatalities in the burn area; Calabasas (October 21, 1996); 101 (March 28, 2003); and Norman (November 18, 2003).^{6,7}



Structures in the Calabasas Interface Planning Unit are predominantly built of stucco, plaster, or masonry. Age class ranges from the 1970s to the present and includes some historic structures. More than 20 subdivisions in the planning unit are gated. Utilities in the Mulholland Corridor are aboveground. Most homes built since 2000 were constructed with current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.⁸

Water supply for the Calabasas Interface Planning Unit is from Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD).⁹ Mandatory water conservation and enforcement measures were established in 2009. The district has one emergency 9,500-acre-foot back-up reservoir.¹⁰

Los Angeles County Fire Station #68 is located on Calabasas Road and Parkway Calabasas.

⁵ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. (2000), Survey of biological resources–Motion Picture and Television Country Home project.

⁶ Robert S. Taylor, Biogeographer/Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 12, 2010.

⁷ Mike Davis (1998), “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,” In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt), pp. 93–147.

⁸ State of California, Building Standards Commission, www.bsc.ca.gov (accessed February 8, 2010).

⁹ Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (2010), District Map [Data], www.lvmwd.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=838.

¹⁰ Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (2010), www.lvmwd.com.

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Calabasas offers a city-sponsored Community Emergency Response Program (CERP). It is volunteer-driven and has participants who represent both the residential and business communities. Roles of those involved include emergency preparedness, education and outreach, block captain assignments, damage assessment following emergency events, and collaboration with the city. CERP communications include hand radio, internet, and Calabasas television and radio programs.¹¹

The city of Calabasas adopted stringent building standards in 2008 that amended the city code for siting homes, outbuildings, and appurtenances to include types of allowed construction materials for decks, floors, underfloors, walls, eaves, roofs, tanks, and water delivery systems. This ordinance is designed to “harden” structures to survive wildfire events.¹² Guidelines were published in 2010 that advise keeping all ornamental vegetation away from roofs, installing chimney screens, and preparing household evacuation plans.¹³

Calabasas adopted a resolution in 2006 to support and help create a solid-waste conversion technology facility at the local landfill.^{14,15} This project will eventually utilize *biomass* such as green waste, landscaping materials, and wood as usable energy for the community.



19.2. Calabasas Interface Evacuations

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines in the Mulholland Corridor, fallen trees, traffic, and locked gates. There are many cul-de-sacs in the area. Several venues in the Calabasas Interface Planning Unit host large groups of people and include retail and commercial businesses, recreational facilities and parks, schools, municipal buildings, and two senior care facilities/communities. The area is densely populated. Some of the many community facilities, parks, and schools may be appropriate evacuation sites. These factors should be taken into consideration with local law enforcement and fire authorities when planning.

19.3. Calabasas Interface Community Meeting Summary

The Calabasas Interface community meeting was held at Diamond X Ranch on January 14, 2010. Two residents and seven non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at the community meeting. These can be located on Map II.19-1 at the end of this document.

¹¹ City of Calabasas (2010), Community Emergency Response Program, www.cityofcalabasas.com/departments/cerp.html.

¹² City of Calabasas (2008), Ordinance 2008-246, www.cityofcalabasas.com/pdf/agendas/council/2008/052108/item2-attachment-a.pdf.

¹³ City of Calabasas (2010), “Wildfire,” www.cityofcalabasas.com/emergency/wildfire.html.

¹⁴ City of Calabasas (January 11, 2006), “Minutes of a regular meeting of the city council of the city of Calabasas,” California, www.cityofcalabasas.com/pdf/agendas/council/2006/020106/item1.pdf.

¹⁵ City of Calabasas, 2006, Resolution No. 2006-997: “A resolution of the City Council of the City of Calabasas, California supporting the solid waste conversion technology and requesting a facility at the Calabasas landfill,” www.cityofcalabasas.com/pdf/agendas/council/2006/011606/item12-revised.pdf.

FIGURE II.19-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- Alice C. Stelle Middle School
- Bay Laurel School
- Leones Adobe
- Calabasas City Hall
- Calabasas High School
- Chaparral Elementary School
- Commons Shopping Center
- Gelsons Village Market Center
- Los Angeles County Fire Department Station #68
- Montessori School
- Motion Picture Home/Assisted Living
- Private day care
- Silverado Alzheimer's Convalescent Home
- Viewpoint Private School

19.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects

The following items are community-identified projects from the community meeting. Residents were encouraged to “think big,” and not be concerned about project cost or property ownership for the project brainstorming process. Following the brainstorming, residents prioritized projects based on which were most realistic and most important to them. These projects can be seen on Map II.19-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.19-2. CALABASAS INTERFACE COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK
Arson Watch program – expand to this area	Risk Reduction	1
Community wildfire education campaign	Education	2
Generators at water pump stations	Water	2
Comprehensive plan for evacuating large animals, with educational outreach regarding plan	Evacuation	3
Program to remove hazardous trees such as eucalyptus	Fuel Reduction	3
Improve cell coverage	Risk Reduction	3
“Hardening home” program with incentives	Hardening Homes	
Mulholland Highway improvements	Evacuation	
Form a Fire Safe Council	Fire Safe Council	
Xeriscape landscaping program	Fuel Reduction / Policy	
Neighborhood ID card system (for return home entry)	Policy	
Add more road emergency phones	Emergency Preparedness	

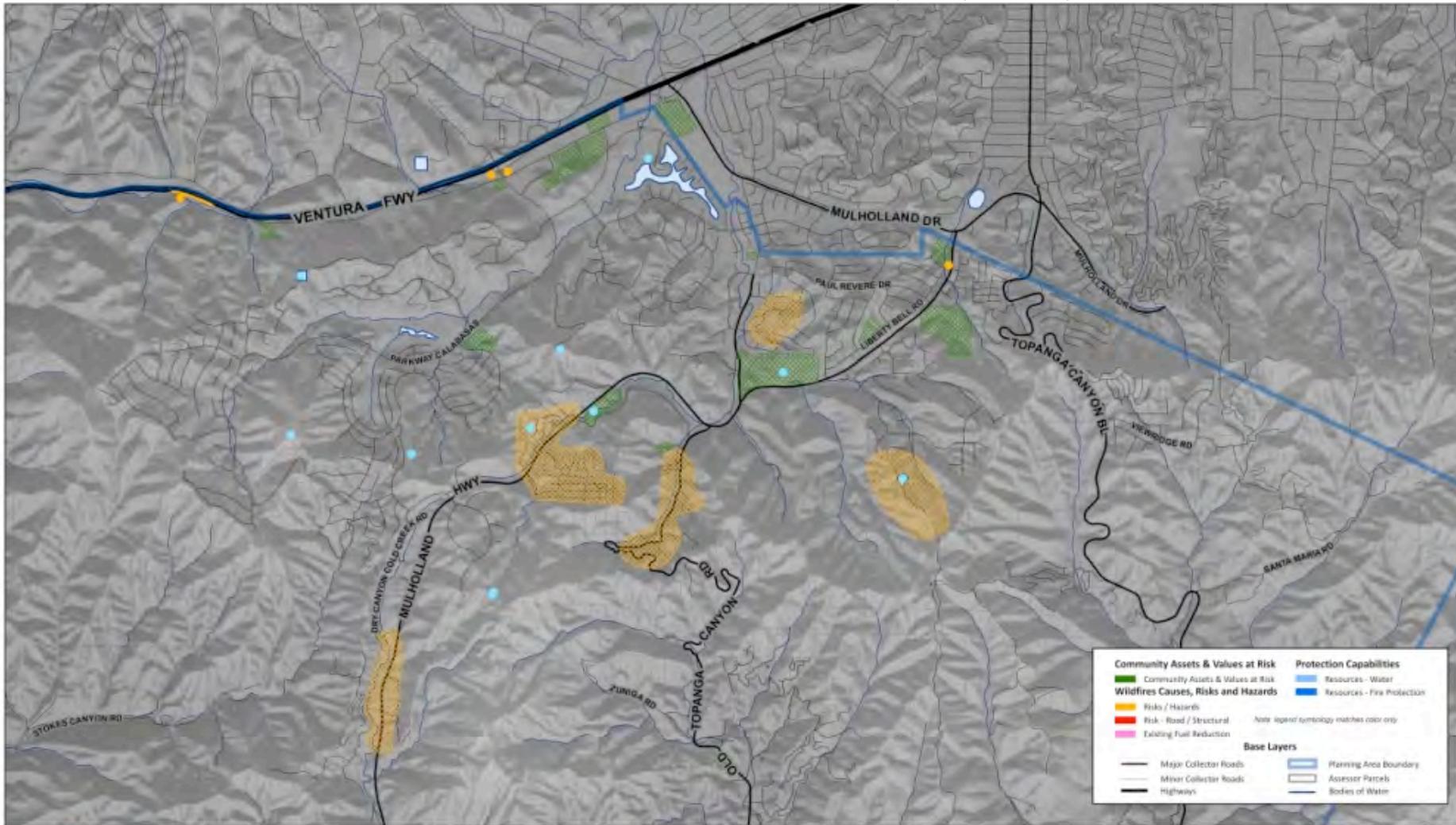
19.4. Calabasas Interface Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Calabasas Interface Planning Unit.

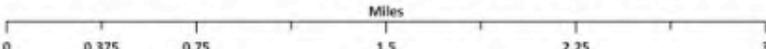
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- Residents reduce urban fuels in the home ignition zone based on the Conservation Principles and Best Management Practices outlined in Chapters 1, 4, and 5 of this CWPP. Fuels maintenance should be a routine and ongoing practice for all homes and landscapes in the Santa Monica Mountains. This includes: ensuring structures are resistant to heat and embers, maintaining all vegetation “from the house out,” and removing anything in this zone that might ignite and spread fire.
- Through a FSC, homeowner’s association (HOA), or other community organization, implement a hazard tree removal/thinning program, in priority order:
 - Along main evacuation routes, including Old Topanga Canyon Road and Mulholland Highway (especially along its southern end within city limits),
 - Along the spur roads to main evacuation roads,
 - Near homes, especially trees that threaten more than one home, beginning in Calabasas Highlands, along Old Topanga Canyon Road south of Mulholland Highway, and the area east of Meadow Lark Drive off Old Topanga Canyon Road,
 - Trees in or near power lines.
- Ensure that at least one team from each homeowner’s association or neighborhood participates in the Calabasas Community Emergency Response Program (CERP) training.
- Form a local Fire Safe Council or join with nearby FSCs. This organizational structure will facilitate community preparedness for wildfire. Work with the California Fire Safe Council to create a FSC that will best accommodate and enable this area. One option is a larger Calabasas-wide FSC that could have representatives from each of the different neighborhoods and homeowner’s associations. A larger group provides greater support, instead of some individuals having to take on most of the work and becoming overwhelmed.
- Work through a new FSC or existing HOA (or other community organization) to begin a local community education and preparedness campaign. Include community education on pool pumps, generators, and home fire preparedness equipment. This can be done in cooperation with other area FSCs and/or the City of Calabasas and the Los Angeles County Fire Department.
- Develop a neighborhood Arson Watch program. This could be integrated into the work of the Fire Safe Council. Work with the City of Calabasas to help with Arson Watch in nearby parks and open spaces during Red Flag weather.
- Explore community purchase and installation of wildland-urban interface (WUI) building products to upgrade homes to current WUI building standards. All residents upgrade homes to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.
- Work through HOAs to educate residents on the need to keep ingress and egress/evacuation routes clear. Residents need to understand the dangers involved in imprudent parking or long-term street storage of unused vehicles. Because natural disasters can strike at any time, key evacuation ingress/egress routes must be kept free of parked vehicles, especially trailers and other large objects that are difficult to move quickly. Trash cans and other items should be kept off the roadway and out of key turnout/passing areas. A neighborhood organizing project would include creating off-street parking where it is limited. Neighbors can work together to help each other stay in compliance.
- Through a Fire Safe Council, homeowner’s association, or other neighborhood-level group, work with law enforcement, City of Calabasas, and Los Angeles County Fire Department to develop a local evacuation plan. Develop plan for large animal evacuation as well. Ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions for rapid evacuation.

MAP II.19-1. CALABASAS INTERFACE: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS¹⁶




Calabasas Interface
Community-Identified Assets, Risks, Hazards, and Projects




National Park Service
 Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Santa Monica Mountains CWPP 2010
 Source: SMM CWPP
 Community Meetings
 2009-2010

¹⁶ This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.