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20. Ventura: Hidden Valley – Lake Sherwood Community Fire Safety Action Plan¹

20.1. Ventura: Hidden Valley – Lake Sherwood Description

This planning unit includes the neighborhoods of Hidden Valley, Lake Sherwood, and East Carlisle Canyon, in unincorporated Ventura County. The Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood unit extends from the Thousand Oaks city limit along Potrero Road to the east including Lake Sherwood to the Westlake Village city limit. Its northern boundary follows the ridgeline that borders Thousand Oaks at the top of Ventu Park. Its southern boundary is the ridgeline that borders Hidden Valley and the southern aspect of East Carlisle Canyon. The Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood unit is 11 square miles in area.

Assets at risk in the built environment include less than 700 single-family homes, trailers, outbuildings, ranches, and estates.^{2,3} Additional assets include open-space areas (Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency), national park lands, several large equine farms and facilities, several artificial lakes and ponds, a few historic structures, country club with a golf course and tennis courts, Ventura County Fire Station #33, and communications repeater towers. Properties and homes vary in size. Parcels range from a fraction of an acre to more than 40 acres.⁴ Single-family homes start at \$799,000 and are currently priced up to \$13 million for large estates and farms. Undeveloped parcel prices start at \$200,000.⁵

20.1.1. Ventura: Hidden Valley – Lake Sherwood Wildfire Environment

The Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood Planning Unit includes pristine coastal sage scrub habitat, mixed chaparral/oak woodland, southern sycamore riparian woodland, cottonwood woodland, alder woodland, California bay laurel woodland, big-leaf maple woodland, and vernal riparian habitat. Many sensitive, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species are identified in this unit, due in part to the presence of critical wildlife habitat corridors. Carlisle Canyon is designated for public lands acquisition and restoration as a



tributary to Malibu Creek.⁶ At least 17 highly significant cultural resource sites are found throughout the area.⁷ The Lake Sherwood–Hidden Valley Area Plan (a part of the 2005 Ventura County General Plan) recognizes and

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

² County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

³ County of Ventura Public Works (2009), “Lake Sherwood Community Services District Water Service,” http://portal.countyofventura.org/portal/page/portal/public_works/watersanitation/lake_sherwood.

⁴ County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

⁵ Homes.com, “East Carlisle - Lake Sherwood,”

www.homes.com/listing/107395912/000_East_Carlisle_Lake_Sherwood_CA_91361 (accessed March 4, 2010).

⁶ Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (2006), Proposition 84–Project Planning and Design: Potential Project Area List.

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emphasizes protection of these resources by requiring strict management of pesticide use; limits fuels clearance to a maximum of 2 acres per development; requires use of non-invasive, fire-resistant, and drought-tolerant plants, to be irrigated only while being established; includes development of deed restrictions and codes to prohibit fuels clearance in some areas; suggests condensed development footprints for new construction; puts limits on grading; restricts fence building in some areas; preserves and protects cultural resources, requiring cultural resources assessments for each proposed development; discourages new projects in High Fire Hazard Severity Zones; encourages donations of private lands as open space to public agencies; and requires compensatory natural resources mitigation for all new development.^{8,9}

Passive recreational opportunities include walking, jogging, bicycling, dressage, and horseback riding. Developed and private types include automobile touring, dirt biking, motor biking, pool swimming, tennis, and golf.

The Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood Planning Unit is designated as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. This determination by the state is based on factors such as fire weather, slope, and fuel loading, among others.



Ingress and egress is from Potrero Road to the north and west, and State Route 23 (Decker Canyon Road) to the east. Connectivity and condition of lateral roads in the unit vary. Some roads and drives are dirt. Many in Lake Sherwood have circuitous connections. Carlisle Canyon and most of the lateral roads in Hidden Valley are cul-de-sacs. Much of Carlisle Canyon Road is narrow with little or no shoulder. Roads in Hidden Valley generally have shoulders. There are three modern subdivisions in Lake Sherwood with curbs and sidewalks.

The Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood unit has a history of wildfires with an increase in frequency of incidents over the last 20 years: Potrero (November 1930); 30,000-acre Latigo complex (1935); Ventu Park (November 7, 1955); 16,400-acre Newton complex (December 28, 1956) with 100 homes destroyed in the burn area; Los Robles (June 22, 1976); Decker (July 4, 1976); Sherwood (June 30, 1985); Carlisle (July 15, 1992); 30,000-acre Green Meadow (October 26, 1993) with two homes destroyed in the unit; Hidden (October 30, 1997); Potrero (August 12, 1998); Triunfo (September 2, 1998); Sherwood (September 2, 1998); Wendy (August 9, 2000); Sherwood (July 6, 2006); Deer Ridge (April 1, 2007); Sandstone (July 22, 2007); Sterling (December 8, 2007); Potrero (February 8, 2008).^{10,11}

Homes in the Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood Planning Unit have a variable age-class. Older structures tend to be wooden. Newer structures generally are constructed of stucco, plaster, or masonry. Many homes, regardless of age, have wooden or plastic decks, fences, or outbuildings. Many older homes have been remodeled. Some utilities are underground. Most of the older and more rural neighborhoods have aboveground utilities including propane tanks. Many farms and ranches in Hidden Valley, properties in East Carlisle Canyon, and developments at Lake Sherwood are gated. The Lake Sherwood–Hidden Valley Area Plan requires the following for each new development: undergrounding of utilities; cost-share fees for public infrastructure improvements; non-combustible roofing and

⁷ County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

⁸ County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

⁹ Christina Danko, Staff Biologist, Ventura County Planning Department, personal communication, March 2010.

¹⁰ Robert S. Taylor, Biogeographer / Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 12, 2010.

¹¹ Mike Davis (1998), “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,” In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt), pp. 93–147.

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siding; fuel modification plan; and a restriction that each new cul-de-sac is limited to less than 800 feet in length.¹² Many structures in the Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood unit are not retrofitted to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards, but on average homes in the unit are among the more structurally fire safe in the Planning Area as long as they and surrounding grounds are routinely maintained.¹³

Mature, lush, and tall ornamental vegetation is found throughout the entire unit and is predominant in the older section of Lake Sherwood and Carlisle Canyon. Carlisle Canyon has the heaviest fuels in the planning unit, along a narrow, winding, dense canyon with one-way ingress/egress.

Municipal water supply for the Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood unit varies with each neighborhood. Carlisle Canyon property owners rely on individual wells. The Lake Sherwood–Hidden Valley Area Plan limits new development in Carlisle Canyon until adequate services are available, including water.¹⁴

Lake Sherwood residents receive water from the Lake Sherwood Community Services District (LSCSD), which is governed by Ventura County Supervisors. The LSCSD has 18 miles of water lines, two pump stations, and two reservoirs with 5 million gallons of total water storage capacity. The District is responsible for operation and maintenance of the system.¹⁵ The Lake Sherwood–Hidden Valley Area Plan specifies that reclaimed water from the local Triunfo County Sanitation District is to be used for large landscaped areas such as the Lake Sherwood golf course. The document adds that groundwater wells in the area are only for domestic use, with secondary use by emergency service providers.¹⁶

The Hidden Valley Municipal Water District serves Hidden Valley. Each property is reliant on its own groundwater well. The Hidden Valley groundwater basin is 3.5 square miles in area. It drains to Lake Sherwood and is recharged by ground infiltration (from annual rainfall of 20–24 inches). The aquifer is reliant on full recharge during exceptionally wet years to be sustainable. Cumulative and ongoing overdraft threatens the supply.¹⁷ Hidden Valley residents refused an option to purchase water deliveries from outside suppliers in 1956. This vote discouraged large development and kept the valley in agricultural production. Fourteen percent of arable land in Hidden Valley was irrigated in 1956.¹⁸ Intensive and high-water-use agricultural activities have increased since that time, with horse farms and irrigated pasture becoming the biggest water consumers. Prolonged drought during the last decade exacerbated the overdraft of the Hidden Valley groundwater basin. Several wells as deep as 600 feet either had no water or experienced water quality problems such as bacterial contamination. The paucity resulted in purchase of trucked-in water or purchased acre-feet from the Lake Sherwood Community Services District. The sale of the latter source was deemed illegal and stopped in 2009. Costs for purchased supplemental water ranged from \$2,500 to \$15,000 per month per user.¹⁹

¹² County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

¹³ State of California Building Standards Commission, www.bsc.ca.gov (accessed February 8, 2010).

¹⁴ County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

¹⁵ County of Ventura Public Works (2009), “Lake Sherwood Community Services District Water Service,” http://portal.countyofventura.org/portal/page/portal/PUBLIC_WORKS/WaterSanitation/lake_sherwood.

¹⁶ County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

¹⁷ Department of Water Resources (February 27, 2004), “Hidden Valley groundwater basin,” *California’s groundwater bulletin 118 – Hydrologic Region South Coast*.

¹⁸ California Court of Appeals, 2nd District, Division 3 (November 22, 1967), *Wilson v. Hidden Valley Municipal Water District*, 256 Cal App.2d 271.

¹⁹ Z. Barlow (November 4, 2009), “Hidden Valley’s dry wells propelled unlawful water sales,” *Ventura County Star*.

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Water source for Carlisle Canyon is individual property wells. There are no water delivery trunk lines near the neighborhood. Water availability to all areas of this planning unit is limited. Range of reasons includes overdraft, policy, and lack of infrastructure. Water conservation should be a focal point of the community. Ventura County Fire Department expressed concerns about availability during emergencies.²⁰

The Lake Sherwood–Hidden Valley Area Plan recommends retention of open-space areas for groundwater recharge, as well as use of drought-tolerant plant materials for landscaping. It prohibits expansion of water and sewer infrastructure to discourage new development.²¹ Threats to the water supply include groundwater overdraft, infrastructural age and condition, electrical failure, and emergency use during wildfire events.

Ventura County Fire Station #33 is located in the Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood Planning Unit. It is one of the oldest county stations and provides protection to the neighborhoods in this CWPP unit as well as areas of Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, and Decker Canyon. In an appeal to the County, the City of Thousand Oaks recently requested that the station be closed and relocated to the more densely populated community of Westlake Village. This proposal has received much opposition, in part because it would effectively remove emergency services protection from Hidden Valley, Lake Sherwood, and Carlisle Canyon, and more remote areas in Ventura County in the Santa Monica Mountains.²²

20.2. Ventura: Hidden Valley – Lake Sherwood Evacuations

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines, trees, traffic, locked gates, and poor road conditions. Hidden Valley has several cul-de-sacs. Carlisle Canyon Road is narrow, winding with little shoulder, one-way in and out, with only a section maintained by the county. This neighborhood could be isolated from fire protection services and unable to evacuate in a wildfire.²³ The Ventu Park Fire Road may serve as an escape route to the north from Potrero Road only if recommended by local law enforcement during incidents. Preplanning will be necessary for this use as the road is private, dirt, gated, and locked.²⁴ Large groups of people can convene at Lake Sherwood Country Club. There are thousands of horses and small domestic animals in this planning unit. Evacuation plans should include all these considerations. Evacuation efforts should be coordinated with community emergency service providers.

20.3. Ventura: Hidden Valley – Lake Sherwood Community Meeting Summary

The Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood community meeting was held at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Headquarters on January 6, 2010. Seven residents/land managers and five non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at the community meeting. These can be seen on Map II.20-1 at the end of this document.

²⁰ Larry Williams, Fire Prevention Supervisor/Manager, Fire Hazard Reduction Unit, Ventura County Fire Department, personal communication, 2010.

²¹ County of Ventura Planning Division (November 15, 2005), *General Plan*, “Lake Sherwood/Hidden Valley Area Plan.”

²² Linda Parks (April 2009), Ventura County Supervisor 2nd District, position paper.

²³ Damon Wing, Senior Administrative Aide, Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks 2nd District, personal communication, January–June 2010.

²⁴ Bill Pratt, President, Ventu Park Fire Safe Council, Inc., personal communication, March 2010.

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FIGURE II.20-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- 1930s historic barn
- Santa Monica Mountains dudleya (*Dudleya cymosa ssp. marcescens*) – Rare plant, Hidden Valley
- Ventura County Fire Station #33
- Hidden Valley horse boarding (hundreds)
- Lyons pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*) – Endangered plant
- Movie production sites
- Repeaters for National Park Service and Sheriff Search and Rescue; satellite and cable communication towers on Rasnow Peak



20.1.2. 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. These proposed projects can be seen on Map II.20-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.20-2. VENTURA: HIDDEN VALLEY – LAKE SHERWOOD COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK
Water lines and fire hydrants down Potrero and Hidden Valley roads	Water	1
Comprehensive fire education campaign, more “Ready-Set-Go” information presented in more ways	Education	2
Neighborhood Watch/HOA/CERT/FSC/phone tree/website, organization of emergency information for community	Education / Preparedness	2
Early warning system for Carlisle (handheld radios)	Evacuation	3
Water lines and fire hydrants down Carlisle Canyon Road	Water	3
Prevent City of Thousand Oaks from removing Fire Station #33, Keep Sherwood Fire Station #33	Fire Protection	
Prescribed burn (fuel reduction)	Fuel Reduction	

20.4. Ventura: Hidden Valley – Lake Sherwood Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Hidden Valley–Lake Sherwood Planning Unit.

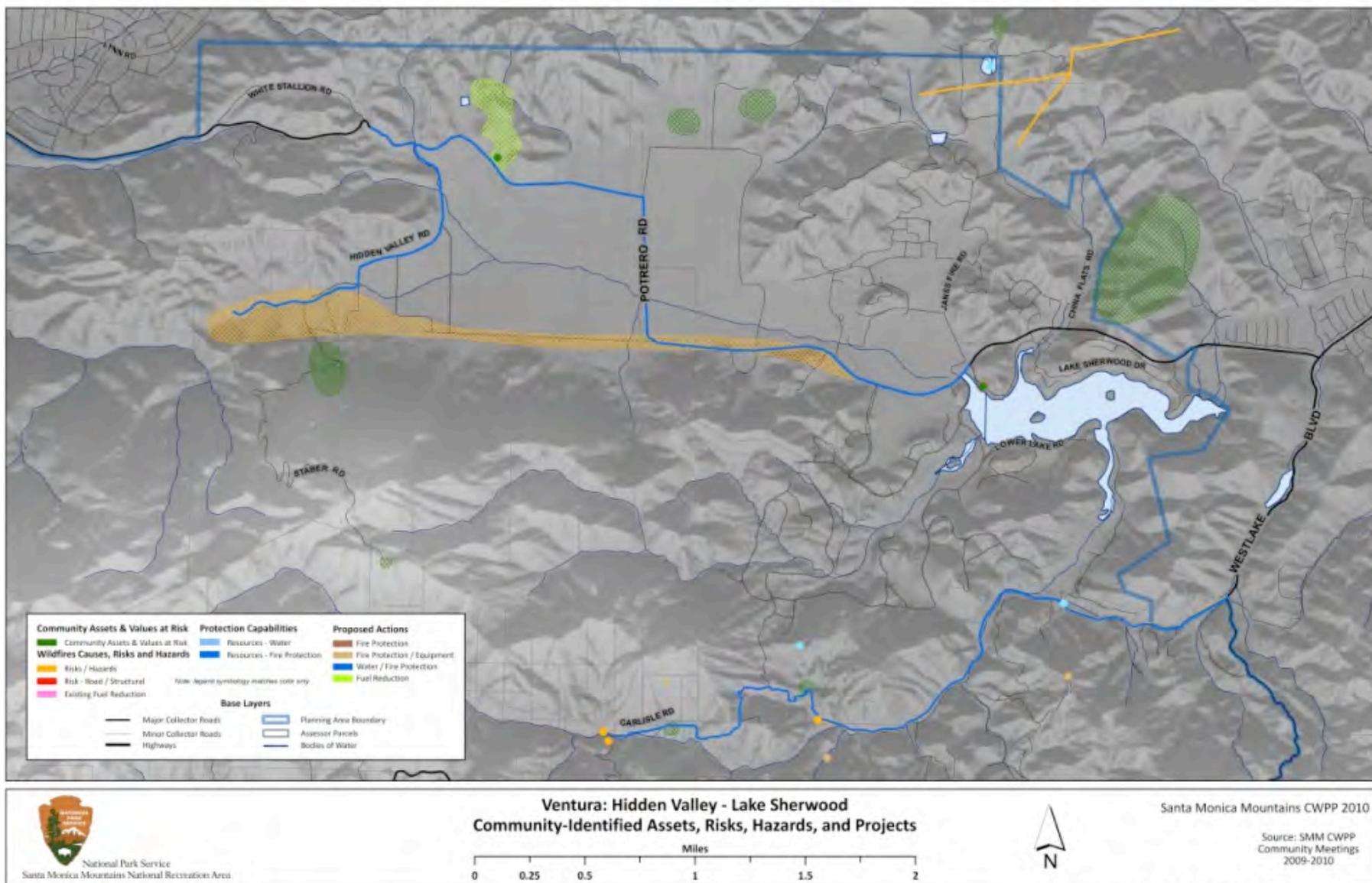
- Ensure that every homeowner’s association (HOA) or neighborhood (especially in Carlisle Canyon) has a local team undergo Ventura County Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training.²⁵ This is the venue to begin organizing locally for evacuation planning, in cooperation with local law enforcement and the Ventura County Fire Department. Work with these agencies to identify potential evacuation areas for Carlisle residents who may be unable to evacuate, and an overall evacuation plan. Efforts should be made to ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions

²⁵ <http://fire.countyofventura.org/Community/CERT/tabid/67/Default.aspx>

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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 throughout the year 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.
- Implement a hazard tree removal/thinning program through a Fire Safe Council (FSC), HOA, or other community organization, in cooperation with local open space lands management agencies and in priority order:
 - Along main evacuation routes, starting with Carlisle Canyon Road and modeling the existing shaded fuelbreaks in place along that route,
 - Along the spur roads to main evacuation roads,
 - Near homes, especially those that threaten more than one home,
 - Trees in or near power lines.
- Form a local Fire Safe Council or join with a nearby FSC. This structure will facilitate community wildfire preparedness. Work with the California Fire Safe Council to create a FSC that will work best for this area.
- Work through a new FSC or existing HOA or other neighborhood structure to begin a local community education and preparedness campaign. This can be done in cooperation with other area FSCs, the California Fire Safe Council, Ventura County Fire Department, and the National Park Service.
- Develop a neighborhood Arson Watch program.
- All residents upgrade homes to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.

MAP II.20-1. VENTURA: HIDDEN VALLEY – LAKE SHERWOOD COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS²⁶



²⁶ This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.