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5. Decker Canyon – Encinal Canyon Community Fire Safety Action Plan¹

5.1. Decker Canyon – Encinal Canyon Community Description

The Decker Canyon–Encinal Canyon Planning Unit is situated north of Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) in the City of Malibu from the neighborhood of Bailard-Lunita to the east and the eastern border of Leo Carrillo State Park to the west. It includes the neighborhoods of Bailard-Lunita, Steep Hill Canyon, La Chusa Highlands, Lower Encinal Canyon, Lower Decker Canyon, Decker-Edison Road, and several properties located along PCH.

There are also several large estates located along PCH in between these neighborhoods extending to Leo Carrillo State Beach. Properties north of this planning unit include national park, state park, and private lands. This unit is 3.9 square miles in area.

The assets at risk in the built environment include nearly 200 single-family homes, triplexes, duplexes, condominiums, equine properties, a church, nature preserve with conference grounds, riding and tennis club, small animal boarding facilities, horse stables, city park (Charmlee Wilderness Park), and a state park (Leo Carrillo State Beach). A national park open-space property with public access easement is also located in this unit.²



Parcel sizes range from six units per acre in some parts of Bailard-Lunita to 40-acre lots in the western part of the planning unit.³ The larger parcels generally host multiple outbuildings in addition to homes. Real estate values currently range from \$900,000 for condominiums to \$14.8 million for single-family homes.⁴

The entire non-built environment is listed as an Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) and includes riparian, wetland, coastal sage scrub, and chaparral habitat.⁵ This planning unit also hosts significant cultural resources.⁶

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

² Chuck Chriss (2010), *Malibu Complete: Getting Around Malibu – Bailard-Lunita Neighborhood*. http://www.malibucomplete.com/mc_around_bailard-lunita.php (accessed February 2010).

³ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *Land Use Map 1: Nicholas Canyon to Trancas Beach*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file], www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/.

⁴ PublishHomes.com, *Luxury Homes in Malibu*. <http://www.publishhomes.com> (accessed 2010).

⁵ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *ESHA and Marine Resources Map 1: Nicholas Canyon to Trancas Beach*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file], www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/.

⁶ City of Malibu (1995), *General Plan: Land Use Element – Appendix A – Neighborhood Descriptions*. <http://www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/2155/>.

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Ingress and egress is from PCH, Encinal Road, or Decker Canyon Road. Many roads off these three arteries are narrow cul-de-sacs. Streets in Bailard-Lunita, Steep Hill Canyon, and La Chusa Highlands are privately maintained.

5.1.1. Decker Canyon – Encinal Canyon Current Fire Environment

The entire Santa Monica Mountains region is designated by CAL FIRE 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. The Decker Canyon–Encinal Canyon Planning Unit is within this zone.

This area has been affected by large historic and increasingly frequent wildfires. The following wildfires are recorded for the planning unit: Potrero #42 (November 1930), 30,000-acre Malibu-Latigo complex (October 23, 1935), Sequit #54 (July 13, 1940), 16,400-acre Sherwood/Zuma/Newton complex (December 28, 1956), Trancas (September 23, 1978), 25,286-acre Kanan (October 23, 1978), Decker (October 14, 1985), Charmlee (July 1, 1996), Decker (April 21, 1997), Encinal (August 22, 1998), West PCH (April 10, 2002), Decker (November 13, 2002), and Pacific (January 6, 2003).⁷ The 1978 Kanan fire destroyed nearly 200 homes and there were two fatalities. Some of the losses were incurred in this planning unit area.⁸

There are two active slides in the planning unit. The La Chusa Highlands Slide and Lower Encinal Canyon Slide require ongoing engineering efforts to support the surrounding hillsides and roads.⁹



Homes in the area feature many different types of construction and age-class. Older structures tend to be wooden ranch-style homes. Newer construction is often plaster, stucco, or cement. Nearly all homes in the unit have wooden decks or fences. Most structures are not retrofitted to current California Fire and Building Standards.¹⁰

Older neighborhoods generally have dense, mature urban fuels such as eucalyptus and pine that are not maintained. Newer homes tend to be landscaped with tropical flammable exotics such as palms. Utilities are aboveground. It is common

for vegetation in this planning unit to encroach upon power lines here.

A large, disced 100-acre open field is located due east of Bailard-Lunita. This lot has been used as an informal helipad and emergency response staging area for many years.¹¹

Municipal water supply is through Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29 in Malibu. Conveyance is along a transmission main that follows PCH. Water is stored in tanks located on the upland side of the highway, which must be pumped up to uphill parcels. Mandatory water conservation measures were adopted by Los Angeles County in 2009. Threats to the water supply include infrastructural age and lack of capital funds to upgrade,

⁷ Robert S. Taylor, Biogeographer/Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 2010.

⁸ Mike Davis (1998), “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn,” In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt): pp. 93–147.

⁹ City of Malibu (1995), *General Plan – Safety and Health Element*.

¹⁰ Building Standards Commission, State of California (2010), www.bsc.ca.gov.

¹¹ City of Malibu (1995), *General Plan: Land Use Element – Appendix A – Neighborhood Descriptions*.
<http://www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/2155/>.

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increased demand from new development, and emergency use or power outages, such as during wildfire events.¹² This unit is at the western extremity for water deliveries in District 29.¹³

Los Angeles County Fire Station #99 is located on the Encinal bluffs.

5.2. Decker Canyon – Encinal Canyon Evacuations

Impediments to emergency ingress and egress in this area may include downed power lines or trees and landslides on Encinal and La Chusa Highlands. All neighborhoods located off PCH, Decker Canyon, and Encinal Canyon host many additional challenges. There are several locked gates. Most drives are narrow cul-de-sacs. All lack lateral connection if blocked. The Decker-Edison neighborhood is a high-risk area for evacuation because it is located above winding and steep Decker Canyon Road.

Evacuation from Decker Canyon–Encinal Canyon will travel either eastward or westward along PCH, depending on law enforcement recommendations based on fire behavior, wind pattern, traffic, and ingress of emergency vehicles. Decker winds northward into Westlake Village in Ventura County. Encinal abuts Kanan Dume Road at its northeastern end. In some cases, and only on the advice of the sheriff, Encinal Canyon Road or Kanan Dume Road might become optional routes for evacuation.

Potential evacuation areas within this unit that should be investigated by local law enforcement and fire departments include the 100-acre lot located east of Bailard-Lunita and a few other disced lots along PCH.

5.3. Decker Canyon – Encinal Canyon Community Meeting Summary

The Decker Canyon–Encinal Canyon community meeting was held in the City of Malibu Council Chambers on January 10, 2010. Three residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at this community meeting. These can be located on Map II.5-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.5-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- Charmlee Park
- Los Angeles County Fire Department Station #99
- Leo Carrillo State Beach
- Malibu Nature Preserve Tennis and Riding Club

5.3.1. 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. These projects can be seen on Map II.5-1 at the end of this document.

¹² Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy/Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (September 2, 2009), *Malibu Parks Public Access Enhancement Plan – Public Works Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report – Water Supply*.

¹³ Arthur Schimke, Regional Water Service Superintendent, Waterworks and Sewer Maintenance Division, County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Works (April-June 2010), personal communication.

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FIGURE II.5-2. DECKER – ENCINAL CANYONS COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK
Clear trees from power lines	Fuel Reduction	1
No overnight camping with campfires; monitoring and enforcement	Risk Reduction	1
Air surveillance on Red Flag days	Risk Reduction	2
Program for hardening homes with team for installing at the neighborhood/community level. Seek group rates/incentives.	Hardening Homes	2
Close parks on Red Flag days	Policy	2
Funds for vehicles and communication equipment for Arson Watch	Fire Protection / Equipment	2
Educate home buyers on living in high fire hazard area	Education	
Create local Fire Safe Council with neighborhood education	Fire Safe Council	
Clear brush, plant grass, graze cattle	Fuel Reduction	
Reduce urban fuels around upper Avenida de la Encinal	Fuel Reduction	
Create more stringent guidelines for fuel management around homes	Policy / Fuel Reduction	
Surveillance cameras for problem fire spots	Risk Reduction	

5.4. Decker Canyon – Encinal Canyon Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Decker–Encinal Canyons area.

- A hazard tree removal/thinning program should be instituted through a local homeowner’s association (HOA) or Fire Safe Council (FSC). Replace hazardous trees with native oaks wherever possible. Priority implementation order is:
 - Along Decker and Encinal roads as evacuation routes,
 - Along the spur roads to Decker and Encinal for evacuation,
 - Near homes, especially those that threaten more than one home,
 - Trees in or near power lines.
- 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: ensure structures are resistant to heat and embers, maintain all vegetation “from the house out,” and remove anything in this zone that might ignite and spread fire.
- Form a local Fire Safe Council (FSC) or join with other nearby FSCs. 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. One option is a larger Malibu-wide FSC that could have representatives from each of the different neighborhoods and HOAs.
- Work through HOAs or FSC 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.¹⁴ A

¹⁴ The law in Los Angeles County states that trash cans can only be on the street after 5 pm of the day preceding, and until 8 pm on the day of waste collection.

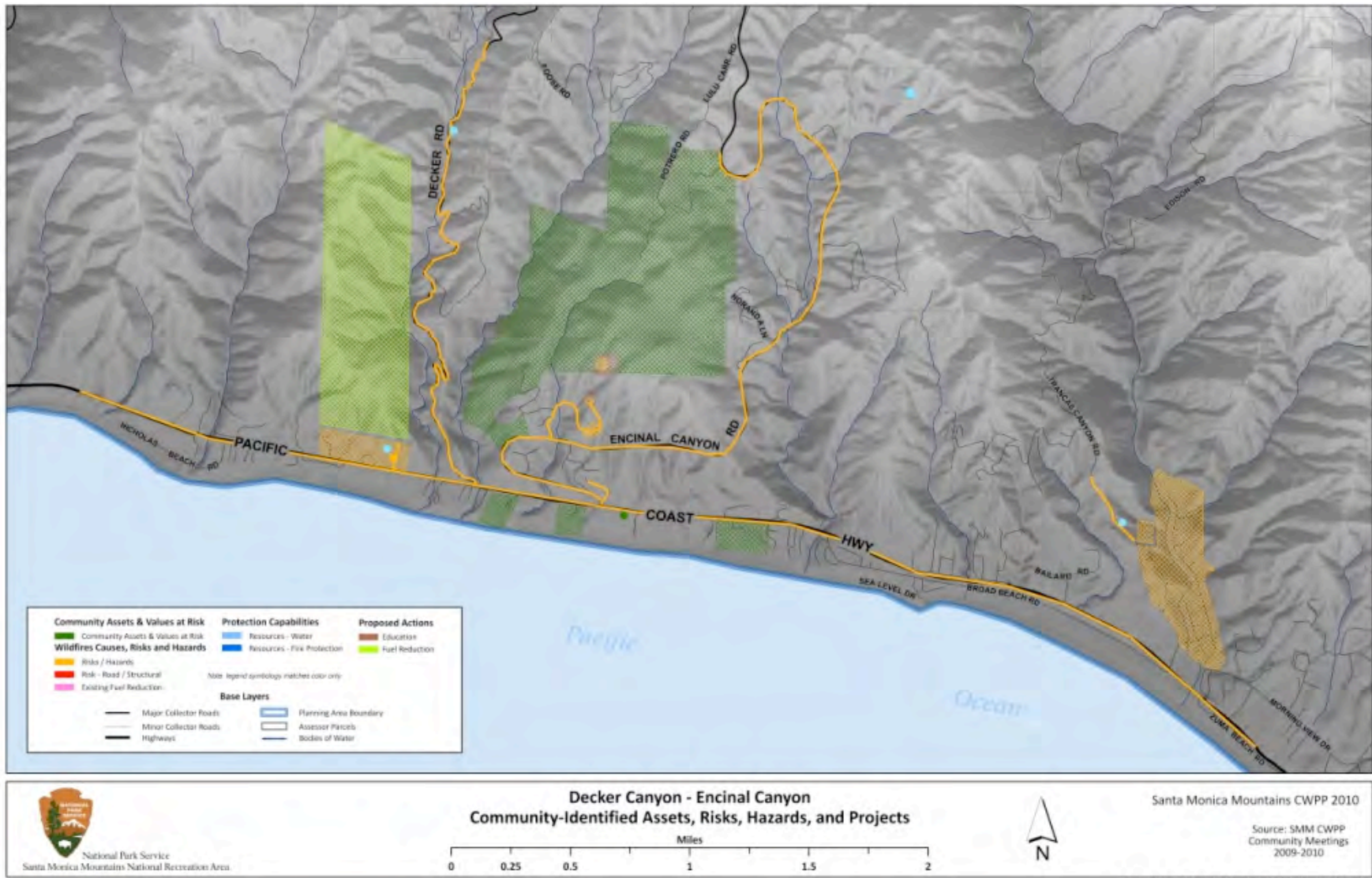
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neighborhood-organizing project would include creating off-street parking where it is limited. Neighbors can work together to help each other stay in compliance.

- Work with law enforcement and Los Angeles County Fire Department through a FSC, HOA, or other neighborhood-level association to develop a local evacuation plan. Efforts should be made to ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions.
- Develop a neighborhood Arson Watch program. This could be integrated into the above-mentioned FSC. Work with the City to help with Arson Watch in Charmlee and Leo Carrillo parks during Red Flag weather.
- Ensure that at least one team from each of the Decker and Encinal roads undergoes Malibu Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. This is the vehicle to begin organizing locally for evacuation planning, in cooperation with local law enforcement and the fire department.
- Work through a new FSC, 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 and/or the City of Malibu, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and the National Park Service.
- Explore community purchase and installation of WUI building products to upgrade homes to current WUI building standards.
- All residents upgrade homes to current California WUI fire and building standards.

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***MAP II.5-1. DECKER CANYON – ENCINAL CANYON:
COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS¹⁵***



¹⁵ This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.