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9. Cross Creek – Carbon Canyon Community Fire Safety Action Plan¹

9.1. Cross Creek – Carbon Canyon Description

This planning unit includes the neighborhoods of Serra Retreat, Sweetwater Mesa, Sweetwater Canyon, Carbon Mesa, Carbon Canyon, and the business district on the north side of Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) between Serra Retreat and Carbon Canyon.

The Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit is situated in the City of Malibu north of PCH between Carbon Canyon to the east and to the eastern shore of Malibu Creek to the west. Pacific Coast Highway is south. Approximately 50% of lands north of the unit are state parks. The other 50% are privately owned. The Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon unit is 1.5 miles in area.

Assets at risk in the built environment include approximately 175 single-family homes, a Catholic retreat and conference center, AIDS hospice, recovery center, Los Angeles County Fire Station and Battalion Headquarters #70, a motel, at least 12 commercial complexes and many single stationary businesses hosting medical offices, personal and business services, retail stores, and several eateries. Properties and homes vary in size. Eighty percent of the 96 parcels in Serra Retreat are one-quarter acre to 1 acre in size. The remaining 20% of parcels in Serra Retreat range from more than 1 acre to 4 acres.² Upper Sweetwater Mesa lots are zoned 20 acres. Sweetwater Canyon parcels are 1 acre.³ Carbon Mesa lots are zoned 40 acres. Carbon Canyon parcels range from 2 to 10 acres.⁴ Real estate values for homes start at \$1.1 million and go to \$18 million for large estates.⁵



9.1.1. Cross Creek – Carbon Canyon Wildfire Environment

The open-space areas surrounding all residential and commercial development in this unit are considered Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs). Upland reaches include coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitat. Drainages and canyons include riparian and wetland habitat.⁶⁻⁷ Sweetwater Mesa is a significant cultural resources area.⁸

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

² City of Malibu (1995), *General Plan – Land Use Element – Appendix A. Neighborhood Descriptions*.

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

⁴ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *Land Use Map 4: Carbon Beach to Topanga Beach*, Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file].

⁵ LALife.com, www.lalife.com (accessed February 25, 2010).

⁶ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *ESHA and Marine Resources Map 3: Dan Blocker to Malibu Pier*, Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file].

⁷ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA, (Revised 2002), *ESHA and Marine Resources Map 4: Carbon Beach to Topanga Beach*, Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file].

⁸ C. King (1967), “The Sweetwater Mesa site (LAN–267) and its place in southern California pre-history.” In *University of California Archaeological Survey Annual Report*, pp. 25–76.

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There are no public lands or facilities in this planning unit. Recreational opportunities are private except for those along roadways. Developed private types include swimming, tennis, and dressage. Passive recreation types are walking, running, and bicycling.

Ingress and egress is from the thoroughfare of PCH. Few roads are interconnected and most are cul-de-sacs. Serra Retreat and its adjoining neighborhood of Sweetwater Mesa are gated and guarded at the two entries on Cross Creek and Serra Roads. Several homes in the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit are gated.

CAL FIRE designated the entire Santa Monica Mountains region as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit is included. This determination by the state is based on factors such as fire weather, slope, and fuel loading, among others.

The Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon area experienced several wildfires in the last century: Calabasas (1903); Las Flores #47 (October 20, 1942); Hume (December 27, 1956); 28,201-acre Wright (September 25, 1970) with 403 homes lost and ten fatalities in the burn area; 5,197-acre Piuma (October 14, 1985); Old Topanga (November 2, 1993) with 400 homes lost and three fatalities in the burn area; Calabasas (October 21, 1996); and Canyon (October 21, 2007) with homes destroyed in the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit.⁹⁻¹⁰⁻¹¹

Two landslides are active in the area: Carbon Canyon Slide and Carbon Mesa Slide. There is potential for unstable slopes resulting from these slides to affect ingress and egress in the two neighborhoods.



Homes in the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit have a variable age-class. Older structures are often wooden type. Many homes, regardless of age, have wooden decks and/or fences. Newer structures are often constructed of plaster, stucco, or cement. Mature ornamental vegetation is found throughout the entire unit and is predominant in Serra Retreat and Carbon Canyon. Large stands of unmaintained eucalyptus line the main evacuation route out of Serra Retreat. Flammable and fibrous tropical species are common in Sweetwater Canyon, homes on PCH, Carbon Mesa, and lower

Carbon Canyon. Vegetation encroaches upon many power lines in the area. Many older homes have been remodeled. Most structures in the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon area are not retrofitted to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.¹²

Municipal water supply is through Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29 in Malibu. Conveyance is along a transmission main that follows PCH, with water stored in tanks located on the upland side of the highway. The county adopted mandatory water conservation measures in 2009. Threats to the water supply include infrastructural age and lack of capital funds to upgrade, increased demand from new development, emergency use such as during wildfire events, and electrical failure during wildfire events, which may inhibit access to water.¹³⁻¹⁴

⁹ Mike Davis (1998), “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn.” In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt): pp. 93–147.

¹⁰ J. Friedman (October 31, 2007), “Malibu fire damages run the gamut,” *Malibu Times*.

¹¹ Robert S. Taylor, Biogeographer/Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 12, 2010.

¹² State of California, Building Standards Commission, www.bsc.ca.gov (accessed February 8, 2010).

¹³ 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*.

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Los Angeles County Fire Station #88 is located southwest of the unit, and Los Angeles County Fire Station #70 is at the corner of Carbon Canyon Road and PCH.

9.2. Cross Creek – Carbon Canyon Evacuations

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines, trees, traffic, or landslides. Most streets are cul-de-sacs in this planning unit. Serra Retreat and some homes in other areas are gated.

Evacuation from the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon area 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. In some cases, and only by the advice of the sheriff, Malibu Canyon Road might become an option.

No possible evacuation areas were identified by residents within the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit. Local law enforcement and fire departments should investigate feasibility of tennis courts and pool areas in the unit as safe areas.

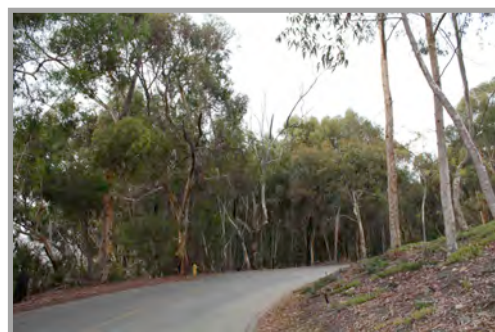
9.3. Cross Creek – Carbon Canyon Community Meeting Summary

The Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon meeting was held in the City of Malibu Council Chambers on October 27, 2009. One resident and nine non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at the community meeting. These can be seen on Map II.9-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.9-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- Business District
- Fire Station #70
- Serra Retreat



9.3.1. 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.9-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.9-2. CROSS CREEK – CARBON CANYON COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK
Regular neighborhood fire safety meetings before fire season	Emergency Preparedness	1
Mass mailings with fire safety info (e.g. “Ready, Set, Go”)	Education	2
Oak planting/restoration as fire buffer above Serra Retreat/Cross Creek	Fire Protection	
Limb/maintain/trim eucalyptus on lower Carbon Canyon	Fuel Reduction	
Open canopy/thin/limb eucalyptus on Serra Road	Fuel Reduction	

¹⁴ Arthur Schimke, Regional Water Service Superintendent, Waterworks and Sewer Maintenance Division, County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Works, personal communication, April–June 2010.

9.4. Cross Creek – Carbon Canyon Action Plan

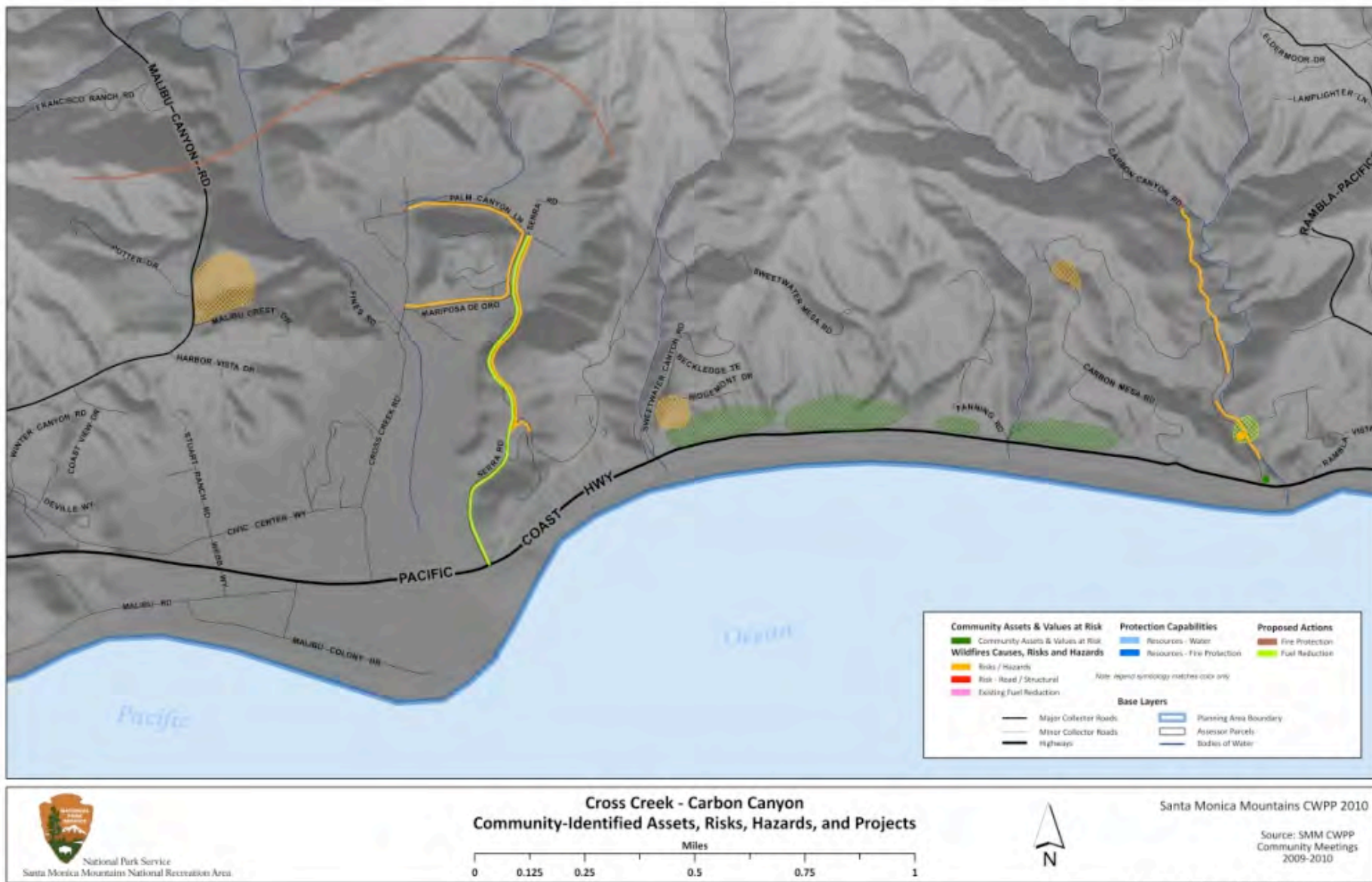
The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Cross Creek–Carbon Canyon Planning Unit.

- 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 homeowner’s associations (HOAs). Fire-safety meetings in the neighborhoods can be held through the FSC, especially before and during fire season.
- Implement a hazard tree removal/thinning program through a FSC, HOA, or other community organization, starting in the residential neighborhoods on the hills and in priority order:
 - Along main evacuation routes, especially Serra Road, Carbon Canyon Road, lower Sweetwater Mesa Road, and Palm Canyon Drive,
 - Along the spur roads to main evacuation roads, especially Mariposa de Oro,
 - Near homes, especially trees that threaten more than one home,
 - Trees in or near power lines,
 - The clump of eucalyptus trees behind Rob Roys.
- 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that at least one team from each homeowner’s association or neighborhood 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 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.¹⁵ 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.
- 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.
- 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, especially in Carbon Canyon. This could be integrated into the above-mentioned Fire Safe Council.

¹⁵ 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.

MAP II.9-1. CROSS CREEK-CARBON CANYON: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS¹⁶



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