



President's Message February 2010

Happy 2010! A new decade begins and with it, the challenges we face individually and collectively. As I enter the home stretch as your President, I want to share the challenges that your Board is addressing and the successes that we can celebrate.

Let's start with our successes: Last January, we met in focus groups that provided the core components for our mission statement. A committee of board members then met to sort and combine said components, and the resultant mission statement is now found on our website and utilized in the decision-making process. A survey was sent out to our online members and other recipients. The results triggered a special meeting on January 10, 2010 to discuss community service opportunities. These will be discussed in more detail in a separate section of the newsletter. We continue to work on reducing our paper consumption and providing up-to-date information by encouraging people with computer access to sign up for our e-mail blast list and to access the newsletter when it is available on-line.

We had such a successful meeting/bbq last July that it was decided to do so again for this year's annual meeting on July 11, 2010 at 1pm! This is an election year, so we will be busy with elections, presentations and of course, meeting as a community and enjoying one another's company!

Now for our challenges! Another component of the survey was asking folks if they would be interested in running for office. ALL RESPONDED NO! This is a challenge for any volunteer organization and FMA is no exception. I have agreed to run for ONE more term as your President, and I encourage folks to consider serving their community organization by running for office. A summary of available offices will be covered in Don McEnhill's election committee update. Last January, we voted to raise dues for members from \$10 a year to \$20 per year. What we found is that couples tended to renew one, not both, of their memberships. So, we are looking at ways to continue serving the members while watching the budget. We had no January meeting at the Villa this year (another survey item) and will decide on the need for a January meeting on a year-to-year basis.

I wanted to extend a special thanks to all the Board members that I have been privileged to serve with these past 18 months. These are folks who live on the mountain and at great distances. Some are working, some are retired and all are committed to supporting the Fitch Mountain Community. I will look forward to seeing you in July and encourage contact at ann-and-laura@comcast.net in the meantime.

-- Laura Rodriguez: FMA President

FMA + FFF = A Safer Mountain

The FMA trustees and officers are in full support of the tremendous efforts of Fire Free Fitch, and they encourage all “Mountaineers” to get involved.

Galvanized into action by the oft-repeated Fire Department mantra: “It’s not whether Fitch Mountain will catch on fire; it’s when,” FFF works from these basic concepts: You can make your property safer (i.e., fire-defensible), but you are only as safe as your neighbors are. The topics on the agenda at an FFF meeting in early February show the scope of this busy grass-roots organization:

- Reflective signs
- Signs for emergency evacuations
- Survey of properties with locked gates
- Timing for a major project of broom removal in current groups
- Identifying volunteers to spearhead FFF action in the remaining groups
- Continuation of the 3-hour free chipping service
- A “walkabout” winter review of each neighborhood to encourage needed pruning or tree and foliage removal
- Formation of an advisory group to help owners decide what fire-resistant plantings are desirable
- Formation of a group of interested residents to address the serious broom problems at the top of the Mountain

Fire Free Fitch organizes neighborhood by neighborhood and has already seen results in 21 areas, starting with the south side of the Mountain. Streets that are “the new areas in process” as of February are North and South Fitch Mountain Road, Redwood Drive, and Riverview Drive.

Linda Mansell was a newcomer to Fitch Mountain when volunteers on Madrone put the FFF model into action there, and she is enthusiastic about the process and the results. “It was interesting to meet various neighbors,” she reports, and it was a real eye-opener as far as fire hazards. “There are things you don’t even consider until the firemen come and talk with you.” After giving out lots of information at the meeting on Madrone, representatives from the Healdsburg Fire

Department and Cal Fire walked around with residents for an informal, advisory inspection of their properties. “It was at a very friendly level,” says Mansell. It took her only about an hour to follow the advice she received about trimming her trees. (Fortunately she doesn’t have any broom.) People in her neighborhood have followed up after the initial session by buying reflective house numbers, clearing brush, and taking advantage of the free chipping offer. Not only do they know each other a little better after these mutual efforts; they also know they are a lot safer than before!

We encourage readers of this newsletter to send an e-mail to firefreefitch@yahoo.com and place yourself on their mailing list.

Fire Free Fitch has a reflective address sign program. You can e-mail the address above to ask for an application or call: 707-433-4111.

Applications for the free chipper service can be found on the City of Healdsburg web site:

<http://www.ci.healdsburg.ca.us/index.aspx?page=425>

Additional forms for reflective signs are available at the juncture of North and South Fitch Mountain Road, across from the Old Del Rio Woods store.

We remind you in the event of a fire on Fitch Mountain, Fitch Mtn. Rd. is the evacuation route. You will be directed to exit the mountain in the opposite direction of the fire event.

Fire Chief Randy Collins, HFD, has notified us that he is requesting from Sonoma County Public Works evacuation signs and other street signs for the mountain community. Budget problems are impacting this request. However, we expect to see signs in the future.

The designated evacuation center for Fitch Mountain is:

The Healdsburg Boys and Girls Club
555 Piper Street, Healdsburg

Don't let this be your last FMA newsletter!

The Fitch Mountain Association wants to be a source of community information for everyone on the Mountain, property owners and renters alike. But the costs of printing and mailing the newsletter may mean that the next issue will go only to paid-up FMA members and people who are on the FMA e-mail list. The digital version of the newsletter has the possibility of color pictures as well as bonus content, such as poetry, articles about Fitch Mountain history, and classifieds. So if you're reading this the hard way, send your e-address to the FMA secretary (ellensilge@yahoo.com) right away! (Note that our newsletter notifications and "e-blasts" about ongoing issues are sent as blind copies, so your address will not be put into general circulation.)

Passing on the Laurels

In what seems to be becoming a proud Fitch Mountain tradition, the title of local Literary Laureate (yes, the City of Healdsburg does name someone to this position every two years) has passed from Penelope La Montagna of South Fitch Mountain Road to Stefanie Freele of Redwood Drive. Stefanie will be reading from her works during the last hour of the meeting of the Healdsburg Literary Guild's Third Sunday Salon at the City Hall on February 21st, 2-4 pm.

Financial Report

Checking: \$1359.83

Savings: \$ 847.25

Listening to your voice

Using our blast e-mail list we queried your concerns for the mountain in November. We received 14 responses to our 70 surveys. That is a meager 20% return rate. We can assume that the 80% of non-responding recipients are satisfied or indifferent to concerns of our neighborhood.

Those responding had the following comments/concerns.

1. Open Riverview Drive to cars again.
2. Clearing brush along the fire trails
3. Clearing Ludwigia from the river.
4. Fire Prevention support
5. Getting the roads repaired
6. Cutting vegetation back from the roads.
7. FMA Official notice placed on illegally parked Vehicles.
8. Garbage cans road blockage--not limited to garbage day.
9. Survey indicated no need for a January meeting.

Those attending the Special Meeting held January 10, 2010 discussed all these concerns. We will be reporting on this special meeting at the July meeting with regard to the Community Service projects. A letter is being drafted for illegally parked cars and will be submitted to the California Highway Patrol for approval.

- A letter has been sent to the Sonoma County Dept. of Public works requesting pothole repair.
- A special meeting was held with your trustees and Laura Tietz working toward cooperation in the Fire Free Fitch project to create defensible space around homes on the mountain.
- We have set May 1, 2010-10:00 A.M. as a mark your calendar date for training on the removal of Ludwigia. This training will be held at "the Grove" across from Kate Barrett's. 2244 N. Fitch Mountain Rd.
- Newsletter distribution: We are considering asking volunteers to hand carry the newsletters in their neighborhoods. Newsletters will be mailed to paid members who do not have computer access, and an announcement will be sent to the Blast e-mail list of the digital copy posted to the web site.
- A committee has been set up to divide the current list of 358 households for phoning to get e-mail addresses to add to the blast list.

2010 Is an Election Year!

All officer terms are up for election this July. Laura Rodriguez, and Ellen Silge are the only declared incumbent. We should all be grateful to them for their willingness to serve another term.

The election procedures committee has been working on refining the election procedure. These trustees are setting up a nominating committee to seek officers for the association.

As noted in the President's message, respondents to the survey showed no interest in running for office. If you did not respond negatively to the survey, or if you have changed your mind, and are willing to serve in an officer position, please notify Laura Rodriguez at the e-mail address on the front page.

The association by-laws, which are available on our web site (www.fitchmountain.org), list officer positions and responsibilities.

Remember, Fitch Mountain Association is your representative voice for local/state entities. Accomplishments of the association were listed in the last newsletter. Reviewing that article will show the effectiveness of maintaining this organization.

Your time commitment is not overly taxing. We hold one to two membership meetings a year. There are four quarterly trustee meetings a year. Officer meetings are held on an as-needed basis.

"Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.... You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love..."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ."

Officers and Trustees: Terms

Laura Rodriguez, <i>President</i>	2008-2010
Collin Joy, <i>Vice President</i>	2008-2010
Maryanne Murray <i>Treasurer</i>	2008-2010
Ellen Silge: <i>Secretary</i>	2008-2010
Kate Barrett: <i>Trustee</i>	2008-2014
Don McEnhill: <i>Trustee</i>	2008-2011
Donita Proctor: <i>Trustee</i>	2005-2011
Alfred Pucci: <i>Trustee</i>	2008-2014

Along Fitch Mountain Road
By Ellen Silge

A fall afternoon: Walking back to the cabin facing traffic like a good pedestrian, I saw a possum body I hadn't noticed from the river side of the road. Not far from the hillside, it was splayed out awkwardly on the dirt as if thrown by a callous bumper. Equally callous myself, I thought, "Survival—or not—of the fittest."

Two days later: The silhouette of the possum carcass has changed somehow. Nearing, I realize that on the mound of fur and on the ground beside it there are now a dozen small lumps, hairless, unmoving. With horror I envision the babies crawling out at night

from the pouch within their mother's cooled body, seeking to rouse some care and affection. They must have tugged at teats that may still have held the nourishment they sought, burning up their meager stores of energy while trying to elicit some response. I see them shivering in the night air and, finally, falling still and motionless on the unresponsive body. Is it any fault of theirs that their burdened mother couldn't outrun a speeding car? Or did she become roadkill herself while pausing to scavenge a similar victim?

The next day: The possum has not been moved. I avert my eyes, but there is no escaping the death smell that is enveloping the bodies, which have become more fluid as rigor mortis has come and gone. There are houses on the river side of the road, and a mailbox on this side. Does no one care about the smell?

A week later: The stench is even worse now, if that is possible. It's hard to believe that people living so close, even if just on weekends, haven't at least flung some dirt on the stinking mound or heaved it up the hillside. Is everyone waiting for someone else to do it? My compassion for nature's victims has been replaced with scorn for some in my species. I breathe through my mouth and hurry by.

Two weeks later: The possum body is finally gone. Did a county worker come along? Did a spouse give an ultimatum? Did a flock of buzzards carry off the carrion? The death spot returns to being a wide spot in the road where there is an unusual amount of shoulder. In a month or two I may not remember exactly where it was.

Penelope La Montagne



Almanac

After a frost, do nothing
resist the urge to prune
the line between alive
and dead is not that clear
the uncertainty will drive you
crazy, but let yourself be
the passenger on that journey
what is lost may amend
that which is yet to come
if you hold a space for it
the new growth will rouse you
from your sleep, insistent,
filling, spilling over the once frozen,
now hollow place inside you.

Water Supply

Healdsburg had a total of 11 days of hard rain in the month of January. The Press Democrat is reporting that Lake Mendocino is now at 95% capacity!

“The January storms have brought Lake Mendocino’s water supply pool to near capacity, with another 10 days of runoff expected to fill it, Sonoma County Water Agency officials said Monday.” (*Press Democrat*)

We can assume that the drastic cutback over last summer will not be needed in 2010. It is not known if we will be asked to conserve water to the degree we were asked last year.

We buy our water from the City of Healdsburg, through CSA#41. Lake Mendocino is the sole source of water for residents and agriculture from Ukiah-Healdsburg.

A.B 885: On-site wastewater treatment (septic tanks) regulation proposals

We informed you of this looming development now being reviewed by the California State Water Board. The issue is still pending. Here is a reminder of how it will possibly affect owners of existing septic systems.

- Owners must have their septic tanks inspected for solids accumulations every five years by a qualified service provider. Inspection cost ~\$325.
- Owners with an onsite domestic well on their property must have a state- certified analytical laboratory analyze well water (groundwater) for specified constituents once every five years and report the results electronically to the State Water Board. Domestic well sampling and reporting costs ~\$325.
- Owners will have to keep documentation to show that they are adhering to the regulations.
- Where existing septic systems have been identified by a Regional Water Board to be contributing to the water quality impairment (pollution) of specific surface water bodies, owners of septic systems within 600 feet of the impaired surface water body will be required to:
 - -- Have a qualified professional determine whether the septic system is contributing to the impairment.
 - -- If so, retrofit the septic system with supplemental treatment (\$45,000 approximate cost for a retrofit).
- Maps of impaired water bodies with septic system discharges are on the Water Board website.
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