

**The Newsletter of the**  
**FITCH MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION**



**One mountain, one river, one community**

January 2013

## **President's Message: Laura E. Rodriguez**

**Happy 2013!** In spite of the tragedies in the news in December, I am always hopeful, especially with the start of a new year.

I am in my fifth year as your president and am proud of the evolution of the association. I would say that we are entering a time of monumental changes and challenges that will require the attention and input of all those who live on and /or care about the mountain.

You will be hearing more about issues concerning water, septic, plans for the mountaintop, planned wall mural, and this year's community service project. I would ask that you save the following dates and plan on attending:

**Wednesday, February 6: Meeting with Supervisor McGuire and key players to discuss plans for the mountaintop [See page 2.]**

Location: Villa Chanticleer

Time: 6:30-8:30 pm

**Saturday, March 16: The Fitch Mountain Water Summit [See page 6.]**

Location: Healdsburg Golf Club Meeting Room

Time: 08:45 am-1:30 pm

**Sunday, July 7: FMA Annual Membership Meeting**

Location: Villa Chanticleer Picnic/BBQ Area

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm

In closing, I would ask one and all to spread the word about your community association. We need membership and people who are willing to assume leadership positions so that we can best face the challenges ahead.

***Sincerely, Laura***

# Water Ombudswoman Report by Donita Proctor

## FMWS Advisory Meetings and News

Laura Rodriguez, Donita Proctor, Supervisor Mike McGuire, and Steve Urbanek met with the City of Healdsburg Manager and Public Works Director on July 24, 2012, to discuss the water rates adopted by Healdsburg in July.

Your Advisory Committee, Laura Rodriguez, Dennis Byrne, Donita Proctor, and Dave Henderson (for wife Kathryn), met with Sup. Mike McGuire and Steve Urbanek of Sonoma County Public Works in November 2012 to review the status of the water system and the rate changes implemented by the City of Healdsburg. Results of the meeting are listed below.

**City of Healdsburg Water Rates Moratorium:** The City of Healdsburg has agreed to maintain the former water rates for FMWS until 2014 (through the end of our current billing cycle). At that time we can expect potential rate changes for our own system and smaller increases from the City of Healdsburg (for the wholesale water cost).

**Future Prop. 218 Rate Hearings:** A formal mechanism has been set up so that future Prop. 218 hearing notices will be sent to the County, your ombudsman, and the association.

**Customer Billing for Water Service:** The county is requesting Russian River Utility to submit a proposal to do all customer billing for CSA#41, and this includes Jenner, Freestone, Fitch Mountain, and Salmon Creek. This will reduce the cost of billing about \$4.00 per account. It will offer smoother customer relations and faster response to customer problems. Mike McGuire will present a firm answer to this proposal at the Water Summit meeting.

**Hiring an Independent Auditor:** Steve Urbanek is investigating the legality of hiring a private auditor, at substantial savings to the district. State law requires an audit of the system every two years at a current cost of \$13,000. The County is working to have an answer to us by the Water Summit.

**Fire Hydrant Testing Report:** Sup. McGuire has asked Sonoma County Fire for a formal report on the status of the fire hydrant testing.

**Grants for Changing Out Meter Heads:** Steve Urbanek reported that there are grants that come tied to loans available through USDA. Such a grant or loan would have to be studied for cost efficiency.

**Water Loss Report:** The large water leak has been repaired. There are no discrepancies in water purchased and water billed to FMWS customers.

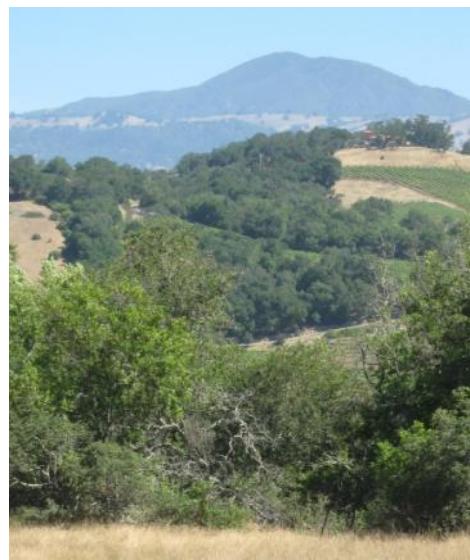
The next meeting of the Fitch Mountain Water System Advisory Committee is January 30, 2013, and meetings will be held quarterly henceforth. The County will prepare the agenda for each meeting.

Questions to: donitaproctor@gmail.com

## Important Meeting for Fitch Mt Residents: A Fitch Mountaintop Acquisition Update

- Wed. Feb. 6, 6:30-8:30 pm
- At the Villa Chanticleer
- With Supervisor Mike McGuire and reps from Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, Land Paths, the City of Healdsburg, the anonymous owners' group, and the Fitch Mountain Fund
- A chance to ask questions, voice concerns, and be part of this process

If you are unable to attend and have questions, concerns, suggestions, etc., to be shared, please email them to FMA President Laura Rodriguez at [ann-and-laura@comcast.net](mailto:ann-and-laura@comcast.net) or call 707 433-9739.



## Floodwatch

By Penelope La Montagna

As rain begins  
it starts with a swirl  
on the satellite map  
then people whisk  
turbulence on their tongues  
into stiff peaks of dread.  
Birds go silent to eavesdrop  
on the gossip of trees  
who know one of them will fall  
and take the power out,  
flatten a car, or pierce a roof,  
rendering their wonderous lives  
maligned in death.

As rain picks up  
water will sprout from the hillside,  
perhaps a rock the size of a car  
will pull away from the mountain  
and block the road.

Without doubt, the river  
will come up and test your metal  
in the middle of the night  
when you can hear  
its thundering applause  
but see only what the beam  
from your flashlight shows.  
The marker you staked  
in your yard has disappeared  
under the advancing opaque water.  
It is time to say whether  
to move everything  
to high ground or stay put.

As the rain keeps falling  
your animal instincts take over.  
You remember the year  
the stand of new daffodils  
held the river at bay,  
got her to retreat.  
You begin to call  
on your unseen friends  
to help with the task  
of persuading the river  
to leave your home alone.

[This letter was received shortly after the 2012 Annual Meeting, with the request that it be placed in the next newsletter.]

Dear Members of the Fitch Mountain Association:

Please accept our sincere thanks for the lovely card and donation to the Camp Rose Players in memory of Jane Moore. She loved Fitch Mountain with all its rustic charm and spirit, as do all the rest of us who reside there, too. Your generous donation will be gladly received for the other thing she held dear, her little theater at Camp Rose that we jokingly referred to as the "Fitch Mountain Theater District." We are pleased to carry on in her tradition with your kind support.

With heartfelt thanks,

Bill Moore, Jennifer Tremont, Suzanne Webb, and all of the  
Camp Rose Players



Rising waters on Redwood Drive beach,  
December 12, 2012 [Photos by Ellen Silge]

## Francesca Trouette

(With thanks to Donita Proctor)



Photo Courtesy Healdsburg Patch

The Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society featured a life history of Fran in the *Russian River Recorder* in the fall 2012 issue. This item will note the highlights of her life, but I would encourage you to get a copy of the original article, available at the museum. The full article is filled with lots of history of Healdsburg and its people. She remembers when Fitch Mountain had only six or seven year-round homes!

Fran is a beloved Fitch Mountain elder who has led a remarkable life and been active in FMA since its inception. (Her photo was in our last newsletter issue at the officer swearing-in ceremony.) As archivist for FMA, I have been appreciative of the legible and meticulous notes from her days as secretary.

Born 11-7-1921 to Italian immigrants in Des Moines, Iowa, Fran attended high school and college there, earning an A.A. degree. In 1941, after taking the civil service exam, her assignment was at a rubber plant with a job gauging 30-50 caliber ammunition. Sometime later, she went to motor maintenance school (she did not know how to drive a car!) and was billeted in barracks even though she was a civilian.

After training in the motor school, she transferred to Omaha to work at an Army Depot replacing motors. In 1943, she joined the Navy, and was sent to F.P.O. in New York City. Upon discharge in 1946, she returned home to Des Moines and took a job as a librarian, as her father told her she had to take care of herself since she was not married. While working she attended Drake University. She met her husband Victor at a "box social" and they were married five months after meeting, in July 1947. Both later attended Seattle University on the GI. bill. She bore two children while attending school (and four after) and graduated with her B.A. in 1951.

After migrating to California she and husband Victor eventually became teachers on the Stewarts Point Indian Rancheria between Jenner and Gualala.

In 1960 Fran and Victor bought a house on Fitch Mountain formerly owned by her friend Iris Thompson, Healdsburg school nurse. Fran still lives in that house 53 years later.

She was recruited by the Chairman of the Healdsburg Library Board of Trustees to come to work in the Healdsburg Library in 1962. There she stayed until transferring to the Santa Rosa Library in 1972. She ran the bookmobile for the library until full retirement in 1982.

As an actor in the Camp Rose Players she has played many roles. None suited her better than the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*. Fran always has a warm smile and a twinkle in her eye. It is wonderful when she attends meetings and shares her colorful neighborhood memories.

As shown in her history, Francesca has always cared for her family, her country, and her neighborhood.

## PG&E Tree Cutting: An Editorial and Informational Update (by Ellen Silge)

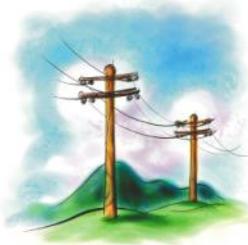
### 1. The Editorial Part—Background and Investigation

In February 2012, extensive tree cutting and vegetation clearing on the north side of Fitch Mountain by PG&E and Sonoma County caused some consternation (including on the part of yours truly), and raised questions about property rights, notification, safety, etc. Because of the overlap of PG&E crews with CalFire and County, the details may never be fully clarified, whether for blame or praise.

My personal investigation of the issues included attending a meeting in Bennett Valley with PG&E spokespersons, organized by the grassroots Save Our Trees organization, as well as getting input from Fire Free Fitch and checking out the utility's website, and led to the conclusion that PG&E's tree removal here was part of their regular outage-avoidance maintenance program and not related to a planned swath cutting along high-voltage transmission lines throughout the county. Although PG&E says this maintenance is business as usual, *it appears to me [note: personal opinion here]* that this kind of clearing, too, has been stepped up about ten notches at least—they'd rather be rid of possible trouble-making trees once and for all and not have to return every year. As detailed in an article by Sam Scott in the 2/27/12 *Press Democrat* ("PG&E to cut thousands of trees in county"), PG&E responded to a threat of draconian federal fines for outages or fires related to power lines by changing its maintenance policy from tree trimming near its power lines to tree removal.

(Having PG&E take out problem trees may actually be a benefit to property owners—that kind of work is very expensive.)

The reality is that a utility company essentially has an "easement" on the property of customers near their lines and can do whatever is deemed necessary. As a property owner you should be notified of impending work so that you can be there to observe if desired, and compensation for "collateral damage" should be available, but you can't keep the crews off your property or dictate what they do (or don't do) there. I did get the feeling, however, that with a reasonable, nonhysterical approach, PG&E customers can lodge an "appeal" of sorts to amend, or at least clarify, planned actions on their property.



### 2. The Information Part—PG&E's Policies/Practices re Vegetation Management

(Quotes from Q&A sections on PG&E website)

- PG&E clears poles in "wilderness areas" that are located in areas of high fire danger (as designated by agencies such as CalFire) and near equipment with the potential to expel hot material.
- The Vegetation Management Department patrols every mile of every line every year.
- Typically, only high-voltage overhead power lines are cleared of vegetation. These are the lines in the highest position on power poles. Secondary lines, those below the transformer, are only trimmed if there is strain or abrasion present.
- Factors that influence the amount and type of trimming necessary include species of tree, environmental factors, irrigation, proximity of the tree to a line, and line configuration.

- Trees that require trimming are those that currently, or will within a year, encroach on high-voltage power lines. Tree inspectors assess the location of trees and their growth rate. In addition, we take into consideration limb configuration and potential wind conditions.
- Area residents are notified of the work when the inspector leaves a “door hanger” notice.
- Do I have to give you permission to prune? When our inspection staff identifies tree trimming or pole clearing work to be done on your property, you should be notified. Your permission is not required, because law mandates that we maintain our lines, and keep them safe and hazard-free.
- Aren't you trespassing if you come onto my property? The utility is legally required to maintain its facilities. Utility easements and rights of ways are often conveyed in the deed to a property. In addition, as a condition of electric service to your home, you must allow PG&E to have access to your property for maintenance at all reasonable times. Therefore, we have the right to access our facilities, as necessary, to properly maintain our facilities. If you have questions, call (800) PGE-5000.
- Vegetation Control crews are instructed to remove any debris resulting from the creation of a firebreak. If the customer has been notified, debris can be left on site for a scheduled pickup 24 hours after the work has been completed. Cut trees, and large branches, are not cleared away because they belong to the property owners; the land owner can request that chippings can be left also, if desired.
- We use several different methods for keeping flammable vegetation from growing beneath our poles, including Environmental Protection Agency-approved herbicides. Permission to apply herbicides will be obtained from all customers prior to work being performed. If a customer gives our contractors permission, contractors may appear an EPA-approved herbicide after they clear bare earth to prevent more vegetation from emerging. The herbicides are applied during the rainy season.
- When customers prefer not to have herbicide applied or the environment is not favorable for herbicide application, we clear the pole manually using a weed whip and rake. A customer may agree to maintain their landscaping around the pole if they sign a Vegetation Management Agreement.
- You will receive a Hire Your Own Tree Contractor letter if you refuse the tree work. Additionally, if a customer does not allow access to our tree crews for this required work, we consider that a refusal.
- A line clearance tree contractor is a tree-trimming company that has an ongoing line clearance safety program. *A homeowner should never hire a private tree trimmer to work within 10 feet of high-voltage power lines.*

You can see this info – and more – at this link :

[www.pge.com/myhome/customerservice/other/treeremoval/customerresources/faq/](http://www.pge.com/myhome/customerservice/other/treeremoval/customerresources/faq/)

### Winter Water Workshop

Mark your calendar right now for our **Water Summit** on Sat. March 16, 2013. The workshop will be at the Healdsburg Golf Course's Club House, from 8:45 am-1:30 pm. FMA is sponsoring a half-day workshop for members and the public (everyone invited; no participation fee) on important water issues that impact Fitch Mountain. Speakers include Supervisor Mike McGuire and Don McEnhill of Russian RiverKeeper. Topics include: history of our CSA41 water district, impending water-service contract changes and rate increases, future of the Russian River watershed, and means of reducing water consumption. (There will also be a report by Mike McGuire on how an upcoming County weed abatement ordinance will affect Fitch Mountain.) A wide range of organizations offering water-conservation devices and programs will have display tables. Every FM resident should attend this important conference. More details to come. We would love more help: Contact Dave Henderson (433-1930/ davehen@sonic.net).

<b>Dues July 2012-June 2013</b>	<b>Become a new member or renew</b>	<b>Dues \$20.00 per member</b>
<b>Name(s)</b>		
<b>Address</b>		
<b>Phone</b>		
<b>E-mail</b>		
Fitch Mountain Association P.O. Box 1233 Healdsburg, CA 95448		<b>Amount enclosed:</b> \$ _____
Donations (though not memberships) are tax-deductible	California 501c #C093278	

## **FMA Membership—Time to (Re)Join!**

We are grateful to all the new and renewing Fitch Mountain Association members for the July 2012 – June 2013 year. We are happy to report a 56% increase in the number of paid members over this time last year! The FMA fiscal/membership year goes from July to June, as reflected in the membership form. If you paid your dues (\$20 per voting member) at last year's annual meeting in July, you are still a paid-up member. If you aren't a member now and want to join officially or help out unofficially, you can send in the dues now, but you'll still need to renew for the July 2012-June 2014 year.

Not a member now? Are you considering joining for the first time or renewing your lapsed membership? Why would you want to join FMA? First, being a member will allow you to stay informed on issues that affect us in the Fitch Mountain area. It will allow you to take an active part in our fellowship, service, and educational opportunities, and even in leadership and decision-making roles. Additionally, a larger membership will help create a larger voice on issues that affect us in the Fitch Mountain community. And, equally important, you'll feel good about supporting your community—and for only \$20 per voting member. Such a deal! Remember, FMA membership is open to all residents and friends of Fitch Mountain, whether property owners or not. Lastly, you don't have to be a member to access the informative website and our newsletter or receive timely "e-blasts" about Mountain issues and activities, but if you are a member and don't have Internet access or simply prefer the traditional medium, we'll make sure you get a "hard copy" to hold in your hands.

*—Kate Symonds, FMA Secretary*

## FMA Monies and Members

- Paid Members July 2012-June 2013:  
70 (53 households)
- Balances as of 1/15/13
  - Checking: \$2690.04
  - Savings: \$1,052.29