

The Newsletter of the FITCH MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION



One mountain, one river, one community

January 2016

President's Message

Many of you will be seeing this bi-annual FMA Newsletter for the first time. If so, "Hello!" from the Fitch Mountain Association, which has been serving our community in various ways since 1979. We've been a relatively small organization (though not in what we've accomplished), but several factors have led us to want to expand our membership. So we decided to print and mail this edition of the NL (usually e-mailed to members) to all FM property owners and residents to tell you what we're doing, what we plan to do, and why we hope you'll join us.

In the last few years, and at a rapidly increasing rate, many issues have arisen that substantially impact our daily lives and environment, and we are struggling to address them in a balanced, democratic, transparent manner. A list would be lengthy, but you'll see some of the issues for yourself as you read through these pages. You may also have a "local-impact issue" in mind that we—with you—might be able to do something about.

There are four reasons we want you as a member: (1) The larger our membership base, the more folks we can turn to in studying issues and trying to do something about them. (Yes, the studying and trying groups are called committees, but ours are fun and really get things done.) (2) Major-impact decisions are being made or discussed all the time, on various levels (especially on the County level, such as the vegetation abatement ordinance, vacation rental rules, paving FM Road--or not!), and we need to get the breaking news out to our members and find out what they think. We want you in that process. (3) When talking to our "partners," be they County agencies and department heads ("Hi, Supervisor Gore!") or organizations like CalFire and LandPaths, we have more clout if we can say that we represent the majority of the ~ 350 homes in our area. (4) There are membership dues. Well, that's not nearly as important as the first three reasons, but your \$20 buys coffee and doughnuts, rents the Villa Chanticleer for FM community meetings (one coming up this month and another in March), gets us power tools for our road safety projects, and other useful stuff.

Bottom line: Please join us. At least give us your e-mail address for our e-blasts (no cost to you). Contact a committee chair if you need information or have some to share. (Their contact info is in **bold** print at the end of their committee reports.) And best of all, join a committee! If you do, all our lives here on the Mountain will be the better for it. Thank you!

Dave Henderson, FMA President

2015 Annual Meeting Report

If you were among the 77 members and guests at our annual FMA Annual Membership Meeting on July 5 at the Villa Chanticleer picnic area, you know we got a lot done and had a lot of fun. And if you weren't there, why not? Here are a few highlights.

New to this year's meeting was a delightful kick-off by our FM cultural treasure, the Camp Rose Players. Suzanne Webb led the troupe in a funny sketch from *Fawlty Towers*. We hope they'll make this an annual appearance.

While we enjoyed pot-luck and burgers cooked by the inimitable team of Al and Phyllis Pucci, we managed to get through a lot of good business.

Kathryn Henderson was confirmed for a second term as VP. She then announced the establishment by the Trustees of the FMA Annual Community Improvement Award for people who have made a significant contribution to FM life. The 2015 award with a \$100 gift certificate (donated by Healdsburg Lumber—thanks!) went to Eldon McFarland and Brian Wells for their decades-long dedication to maintaining the stairs and public access to Redwood Drive Beach.

Full reports were given for most committees, including Water Advisory, Road Safety, and FM Summit Preserve.

Supervisor James Gore (who recalled attending a Camp Rose Players production when he was 8) reported on a host of County issues impacting FM, and assured us of special funds for crews to trim vegetation along the roads. LandPaths Exec. Director Craig Anderson gave a spirited presentation on the present and future of the FM Summit Preserve. For 3 years LandPaths will supervise development of the preserve, and then hand it over to Healdsburg. In the meantime, he welcomes the close collaboration of FMA, especially the strong backs of its members on the monthly Stewardship Days.

—Dave Henderson



Fitch Mountain Summit Preserve

About a year ago, the top 171 acres of our beloved Fitch Mountain finally became permanently preserved as public open space through a long-term effort by a consortium of organizations, including the Sonoma County Open Space and Agricultural Preservation District, the City of Healdsburg, the State Coastal Conservancy, the local nonprofit conservation organization called LandPaths, and others. By agreement amongst those parties, LandPaths has ownership and management responsibilities for Fitch Mountain Preserve (Preserve) for a 3-year period, until they turn it over to the City of Healdsburg to permanently own and manage it as a public open space preserve. During this 3-year interim ownership period, the Preserve is not formally open to the public, but LandPaths conducts public stewardship workdays on the second Saturday of the month to remove invasive plants, and do some trail work and erosion control. Meanwhile the City of Healdsburg is getting underway as of January 2016 to prepare the Fitch Mountain Preserve Open Space Management and Public Access Plan (Plan). The Preserve is anticipated to be formally opened to public access when the City completes its Plan and assumes ownership responsibilities at the end of 2017, or shortly thereafter. A similar process worked successfully for the establishment of the Healdsburg Ridge Open Space Preserve located a few miles to the north.

In their second year of interim ownership LandPaths was busy with management activities like fire hazard reduction (thinning small trees and removing standing dead trees and underbrush, including invasive French broom) along the main access routes to the summit. This work was accomplished under LandPaths' direction by a CalFire crew (on Hilltop Trail) and young adults in the Sonoma Youth Ecology Program. The youth crew sweated away in the August heat pulling up broom along a route longtime locals call the Butterfly Trail. Impassable for years due to overgrowth, this gently undulating trail girdles the southern side of FM and provides sweeping views (if you peek through trees) of Healdsburg, Windsor, and beyond. A gem uncovered!

So where does the FMA come in? We support the activities of LandPaths and the City to provide responsible stewardship activities for people's enjoyment of the natural and scenic values of the Preserve, while respecting surrounding private property. Through our e-blast and other channels, we spread the word about LandPaths' monthly workdays on the Mountain. The FMA created the Fitch Mountain Summit Preserve Committee last year to channel members' input on Preserve management and related issues. The committee has met a few times to discuss what we envision for the Preserve, and that process is continuing. Healdsburg initiated its Preserve management and public access planning effort this month, and the City has committed to reach out to the public for input. So now is a crucial window of opportunity to participate if you care about what happens on the Mountain! Through the FM Preserve Committee, the FMA will give input to the City and its consultants that best reflects our interests in enjoying living and spending time on and around Fitch Mountain.

—Kate Symonds, Chair: kate@terraserve.net

The Roads Committee

Broken car side mirrors, potholes, vegetation encroachment on roadways, graffiti suppression, abandoned cars, sloughing off of loose rocks/dirt from steep hillsides—these are but a few of the issues your FMA Roads Committee has addressed in the past or will address in the near future.

As most folks know, during the month of May for the last two years, vegetation along North and South Fitch Mountain roads that caused traffic to swerve into the oncoming lane has been cut back, greatly increasing the safety of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Two years ago this was accomplished by two dozen volunteers, and last year by the Sheriff's Supervised Adult Crews (SAC's). This year we want to again enlist the assistance of Supervisor Gore in the use of his allotted time for the SAC's to cut back the vegetation.

Last summer Boy Scouts working on an Eagle project painted the fire hydrants a vibrant yellow, eliminating an eyesore and possibly making them easier to locate.

The sloughing off of loose rocks/dirt from hillsides onto roads is an ongoing problem that requires ongoing maintenance performed by the County. This has been done, though not necessarily as often as we would like, at the request of the Committee.

The Roads Committee is a working committee; i.e., each member takes the lead in a particular project and sees it through from beginning to end. As a wise person once said, "Many hands make light work — and good roads."

—Al Pucci, Chair: apuccie@gmail.com

Water Advisory Committee Report

Water conservation remains a high priority in our water district. An important measure of conserving used by the State is gallons used per day per capita.

On average, Californians used 196 gallons per day per capita. The head of the Russian River Utility reported in September that all the small water districts were, in his opinion, "already conserving nearly as much as they can."

Fitch Mountain is using 48.66 per day per capita.

Jan-Aug	Avg. Monthly use Gallons	Avg. Daily use Gallons	Average # persons per household	Avg. Daily use per person Gallons	Reduction
Fitch 2014	3798	126.6	2.46	51.47	unknown
Fitch 2015	3591	119.7	2.46	48.66	2.81

However, given good news on the daily use, there continue to be high water users, some who use up to 62,000 gallons a month! At this point all the utility can do is contact the high users by phone and request a reduction in use. Though we have tiered water rates that increase with increased water use, this does not seem to be a deterrent.

Tiered water rates must be fees set in accordance with cost as defined by Proposition 218. The 4th District Court of Appeal ruled April 20 that the tiered rates approved by the San Juan Capistrano City Council in 2010 violated Proposition 218, which requires government fees to be set in accordance with cost. The ruling didn't declare tiers in general illegal, but the court said they must be based on the actual cost of providing water and can't be artificially inflated to discourage water use.

To address this issue of accurate rates based on actual cost, the county has funded, through the Small Water Assistance fund, a new rate study to be conducted by the NBS government financial group for all the small water districts. Their task will be to create a new financial plan and five-year water rates study. This company will conduct future Prop. 218 hearings. The target date for the new rates is March 2016, before the BOS bud-

Del Rio Beach Committee

As many of you know, after the demise of the seasonal dam at Del Rio, the local board disbanded and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors placed Sonoma County Regional Parks (SCRP) in charge of the facilities at the beach on an interim basis until final resolution is made. A survey of local residents indicated a strong preference for SCRP to permanently take over day-to-day management of the beach, so the wheels are in motion at the County to make that so. This will take some time and we all will hear more from the County and be able to give input.

In the meantime, FMA spawned a Del Rio Beach Committee to ensure that the Fitch Mountain community is involved in the future of the park. We have had one meeting with the parks people so far. Our focus is on establishing a cooperative relationship. We will be advising them on the rules we would like enforced, in particular regarding alcohol (none on the beach) and fires (none whatsoever). Since we are obliged to make accommodations for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Committee is brainstorming other upgrades to the layout, landscaping, and maintenance plan that will enhance the area for everyone.

The Del Rio Beach Committee is comprised of the following members: **Pat Abercrombie, Chair**; Anne Boone, James Brooks, Chris Evans, John Funkhouser, Kathryn Henderson, Louisa Yates, and Susan Steinman. If you have questions or comments, feel free to talk with any of the members or contact Pat at patabercrombie@comcast.net or 473-8217.

Donations and the FMA Mission

The mission of our Association is "to disseminate relevant information to the membership; encourage community; maintain the unique nature of our locale; and establish a positive identity with the public sector." In 2015 the FMA donated a total of \$650 to organizations that the Trustees feel embody important aspects of the mission and "contribute significantly to preserving and enhancing our life and environment on the Mountain." The donations consisted of \$100 each to the Fitch Mountain Fund, to provide ongoing support for the park being developed on the top of Fitch Mountain; LandPaths (see *Summit Preserve report on pg. 3*); Friends of Henry 1, the North Bay regional rescue helicopter; the Sonoma County Deputy Sheriff's Association; and Camp Rose Players. Russian Riverkeeper received \$150.

—Martin Silge, FMA Treasurer

Fire Prevention

After years of near velvet quiet on the verdant, tree-carpeted slopes of our Mountain, the roar of the chain saw and the whine of the chipper have become common sounds lately, and that may go up a couple of notches this coming fire season.

Several partnerships have started to reduce the severe fire danger here. Many property owners have taken advantage of the free chipping service offered by Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services, first under Chief Roberta MacIntyre and now under Chief James Williams, with Supervisor James Gore making sure of the funding and Laura Tietz and Fire Free Fitch “encouraging” property owners. The result was the removal of a very significant amount of ladder fuels. Secondly, LandPaths had inmate crews spend a full month chain-sawing along the roads of the future summit preserve, with the result that we now have substantial firebreaks up there and good access finally for fire trucks.

But more good news is coming. First, in March the Supervisors will begin the approval process of a County ordinance (finally!) requiring property owners in unincorporated areas (= us) to keep properties free of high grass, debris, and small trees (NOT established trees) that could serve as ladder fuel for fire to get into the tree canopy. We badly need these regulations for owners who have not kept their properties fire-safe. (“You’re only as safe as your neighbor’s property.”) There will be public hearings (we’ll e-blast FMA members), educational mailers, et cetera.

Secondly, FMA has joined “our” three fire departments (County, Healdsburg, and CalFire) in applying for a CalFire grant to fund even more (voluntary) fire-fuel reduction during the coming fire season. We’re hoping to get back some of that annual \$150 Fire Prevention Fee you’ve been paying to help us clear out stuff. Also included is construction of a firebreak on Madrone Ave. This could be exciting!

Finally, in order to plan on a short- and long-term basis and liaise with the appropriate agencies, we’re in the process of forming a Fire Prevention Committee. At present we have four members. We’d love to have more participants to brainstorm more ways to safeguard our homes, our properties, and our lives. Seems worthwhile, doesn’t it?

—**Dave Henderson, (Temporary) Chair:**
davehen@sonic.net; 433-1930

Emergency Preparedness

The FMA has recently convened the Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC). The earthquake in Napa last spring caused widespread destruction. Fires in Lake County this fall were devastating, with the loss of over 1,000 homes. Both areas are still recovering and will be for some time. These are two examples of disasters that have recently struck very close to home. The goal of the EPC is to help those of us living on Fitch Mountain better prepare for the inevitable, whether it is fire, earthquake, or flood. A local firefighter recently said to me, “It’s a matter of when, not if” we have a devastating wild fire on Fitch Mountain.

One of the most important issues we face on the Mountain is safe evacuation of residents during an emergency while providing rapid access for emergency responders. As you know, we only have one road in and out, and that road is narrow and in disrepair in some areas. The EPC is working on securing a warning siren and evacuation signs so people know which direction they should go to get off the Mountain. (Theoretically we need to go one direction and the emergency responders need to arrive in the other direction.)

In addition, we feel it is very important for all of us to be educated about disaster preparedness. Here are some questions to get you thinking about how prepared you are: How will you know that there is an impending disaster? (For example, Nixle messages, emergency scanner.) Do you have a “go bag” that includes essential medications, critical paperwork, etc.? Do you have an evacuation plan for transportation off the Mountain, a place to meet family in case of evacuation, a process to transport animals? Is your house prepared with defensible space, fire alarms, heavy furniture secured for earthquake, and other safety features?

SAVE THE DATE

There will be a meeting on Saturday March 5th from 9 a.m. to noon at the Villa Chanticleer Annex to learn about emergency preparedness from the experts and to discuss what we need to do as individuals and as a community to be better prepared for disasters.

—**Priscilla Abercrombie, Chair:**
pdanp@comcast.net

FMA Membership Registration Form

Dues July 2015-June 2016	Become a new member or renew	Dues \$20.00 per member
Name(s)		
Address		
Phone		
E-mail		
Fitch Mountain Association P.O. Box 1233 Healdsburg, CA 95448	Donation amount enclosed: \$ _____	Membership amount enclosed: \$ _____
Donations are tax-deductible		California 501c #C093278

The FMA fiscal year begins in July, so we are halfway through the membership year as well. Renewals for voting memberships will be solicited for the Annual Meeting on July 3, 2016. In the meantime, the form above can be used to support the Association by joining belatedly (at \$20 per person) or to make a contribution.

We'll See You on January 31st

Join us for the Second Annual Fitch Mountain Fun Night, Sunday January 31 from 6 to 8 pm at the Villa Chanticleer Annex.

The fun includes socializing with your neighbors and soon-to-be new friends and playing the almost famous Fitch Mountain Bingo game. The dinner menu is pasta (and a non-gluten alternative), sauces (we're having a cook-off), salad, garlic bread, cake, and soft beverages. And there are prizes! And it's free! (Of course, kindly donations will not be rejected.)

The event is being hosted by the Fitch Mountain Association, but you don't have to be a member of FMA to come. In fact, it's open to the whole community—Mountain residents (whether homeowners or renters), as well as "flatlander" friends.

We can accommodate 60 fun-lovers; please contact Ellen soon to r.s.v.p. at ellensilge@yahoo.com or 431-0814.



Get Involved!

Committee membership can be a very rewarding way to get involved in the betterment of your Fitch Mountain community. Details on most of the current FMA committees, including contact info, can be found in this special newsletter edition:

Del Rio Beach—page 4
Emergency Preparedness—page 5
Fire Prevention—page 5
Fitch Mt. Summit Preserve—page 3
Roads—page 3
Water Advisory—page 4

Also, the Membership & Fun Committee, which is coordinating the special event described on the left, is looking for new members and is fun to work on! Contact: Ellen Silge: ellensilge@yahoo.com or 431-0814.