

The Newsletter of the



January 2019

President's Message

My wife Priscilla and I live on the north side of Fitch Mountain right on the river. This time of year we receive no sun on our property at all, NONE. Somehow this makes me more acutely in tune with the leafless, gnarled trees on our riverbank as well as those that climb up the steep ridge across the river. Thankfully, the rains have come, the river's up, and the surrounding terrain is soaking up its annual dose of water—here's hoping it's a healthy dose this year. I've never seen so many bay nuts, acorns, and buckeyes. The trails in the Preserve are in good shape, and the heavy assault on the broom this past year, which continues monthly with LandPaths, is clearly paying off. Del Rio has a new face, and our continuing collaboration with SoCo Regional Parks should bring some additional enhancements. We've done our darnedest to stay on top of the mysterious processes that appear to be tightening our septic regulations, but the can keeps getting kicked down the road. And speaking of the road... we're still waiting for "the slump" and "the plastic-coated slide" to be fixed "permanently." Our fire prevention and emergency preparedness efforts continue to plow forward with our ever-closer relationships with the first responders we depend on and the county and state representatives who hold the purse strings. This winter newsletter should provide you with lots of new information. Let me know what we missed.

—Pat Abercrombie, President, Fitch Mountain Association

Current FMA Leadership



From left to right: Ken, Dana, Pat, Donita, Marty, Becky, Al, Kate. See what they lead on the next page!

(Photo by Bo Simons)

FMA Leadership

Trustees:

Donita Proctor 2017-2021: 431-8789, donitaproctor@gmail.com

Al Pucci 2014-2020: apucci@gmail.com

Ken Hite 2016-2020: kenhite@comcast.net, (415) 516-2702

Kate Symonds 2018-2019: kate@terraserve.net

Officers:

Pat Abercrombie, President 2018-2020: patabercrombie@comcast.net, 473-8217

Rebecca Goodsell, Vice-President 2017-2019: rebeccagoodsell@gmail.com, 707 473-8479

Dana Eaton, Secretary 2018-2020: dana@eatonstudios.com, 433-4630

Marty Silge, Treasurer 2018-2020: martinsilge@yahoo.com, 1840 Redwood Dr., 431-0814

Volunteer Leaders:

Committee Chairs

COPE: Priscilla Abercrombie, pdanp@comcast.net; and Ginger Hobart, ginger@sonic.net

Del Rio Woods: Pat Abercrombie, patabercrombie@comcast.net

Fire Prevention & Emergency Preparedness: Ken Hite, kenhite@comcast.net

Fun and Appreciation: Ellen Silge, ellensilge@yahoo.com, 431-0814

Road Safety: Tracy Logan, TrLoganImmordino@gmail.com, and Pat Abercrombie, patabercrombie@comcast.net

Septicians (Wastewater): Pat Abercrombie, patabercrombie@comcast.net

Water District Advisory Committee: Donita Proctor, donitaproctor@gmail.com; and Pat Abercrombie, patabercrombie@comcast.net

Communications:

Newsletter Editor: Ellen Silge, ellensilge@yahoo.com

Webmaster: Chuck Eaton, info@FitchMtn.org

F&A Committee in Transition

The Fun and Appreciation Committee (F&A) was officially formed 2 1/2 years ago, with Kathryn Henderson as its first Chairperson after she stepped down as FMA Vice-President. As VP, Kathryn had been a whirlwind of logistics management for FMA events. As the Chair of F&A, she introduced the first Summer Mixers and other social happenings at Del Rio Woods, including a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner. Kathryn turned the committee over to new leadership following the 2018 annual meeting.

We are grateful to Kathryn for all she has done for FMA. She worked tirelessly, mostly behind the scenes, planning for the annual meeting and summer mixers, storing FMA party supplies and pulling them out and setting and cleaning up for each event, painting roadside banners to announce events, and more. Kathryn made event organization look easy, and her attention to detail was unrivaled. Her contributions to the FMA are an example to aspire to — and a hard act to follow!

The new F&A Chair is Ellen Silge, who has incorporated the annual Fun Night into the continuing responsibilities of the committee. She describes her chairperson philosophy as “pretty ad hoc,” explaining that although formal meetings may be infrequent, she gets a lot of help with planning and carrying out activities via personal e-mails and responses to e-blasts. And she appreciates those F&A volunteers very much!

—Dana Eaton and Ellen Silge

Our Fifth Annual Fun Night

Fun is what we make it! This Fitch Mountain get-together isn't a sit-back-and-watch entertainment — it's a participatory event. You are the stars of the evening, and your contributions will make it fun for all!

This year's Fun Night is on **Sunday Jan. 27 from 6:00 to 8:30** at the Villa Chanticleer Annex. The cost is \$2 per adult and \$1 per child.

We are looking for four or five chili cook-off entrants. (We have two signed up already, one of them vegan.) Cook-off entries should fill a large crockpot. "Tasting size" cups will be provided. Each paid attendee receives one ballot to vote for the cook-off winner.

Our potluck dinner will begin right away, while the hot food is still hot. You are asked to bring a **main dish** (something that will go well with chili and the rest of the menu—mac and cheese, maybe?); **cornbread**, a **green salad**, or a **dessert**. The FMA will provide beverages.

After dinner there will be a walk-around "mixer" activity and the announcement of the winner of the chili cook-off. There will also be an experiences-oriented Silent Auction where you can bid on things like a Regional Parks pass or a guided hike. You'll sign in (finally) by COPE neighborhoods—there is a prize for the one with the biggest percentage of households in attendance.

Despite the "neighborhood" orientation, Fun Night attendance is not restricted. You don't have to be an FMA member or even a Mountain resident to attend. Invite your "flat-lander" friends to come have fun too! And this is a family-friendly event. Bring your kids or grandchildren!

After the walking-around activities, we'll sit down to play F-M-A Letter Bingo. F&A volunteers are soliciting donations from local merchants for prizes, but it will increase the fun (and decrease expenses) if some people bring smaller prizes, including kid things, for "letter" bingos. Prizes can be "white elephant" items, as long as they're fun. Not everyone needs to bring something; there is such a thing as too many prizes! But maybe each COPE neighborhood could coordinate to bring one larger item for "black-out" winners.

An R.S.V.P. form will be e-blasted soon so we know how many people are planning to come and what you are thinking of bringing. We're so looking forward to seeing you there!

— *Ellen Silge and the F&A volunteers*



The Road

When will the slump, below Scenic Drive, be repaired? When will the plastic-covered slide below the slump be repaired? When will the road be resurfaced?

These are the questions asked by all of us. The answers re. the slide and slump are the same: when the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) dollars arrive and the requisite engineering studies have been completed. Most likely in 2020.

Regarding resurfacing the road, it will be done using county maintenance dollars and will be addressed when the slump and slide are remediated. Why? Because 1) that's the fiscal funding cycle in which we are placed; and 2) it's more efficient to do the road, slump, and slide during the same time frame.

—*Al Pucci, Trustee*



FMA Treasury and Membership Snapshot

As of 12/31/18, the FMA had \$8,925 in its accounts (\$3,429 in checking and \$5,496 in savings [\$4,594 restricted and \$903 unrestricted]).

At the end of 2018 there were 131 members, 35 of them new to the FMA.

Septicians Committee Report

The latter half of 2018 saw incremental movement on the part of Sonoma County PRMD in the revision of their "OWTS Manual"; OWTS being On-site Wastewater Treatment System, or septic. They continue to emphasize that unless your OWTS is failing or you come to them for a significant building permit, they aren't interested in your septic system. However, the Regional Water Board is simultaneously threatening a proactive assault on cesspools and substandard septs once their TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) is approved by the State. In October the Regional Water Board announced that they had postponed the public hearing on the TMDL until spring pending their analysis of the impact of the State's adoption of *E. coli* as the sole bacterial indicator of water quality in fresh water (e.g., the Russian River). So, once again, we're awaiting their next move. It is still possible that they (the Regional Water Board) may begin their survey process in 2019 to identify property owners with sub-standard OWTS. But the probability is declining. On a related note, Supervisor Gore contacted us about a voluntary sewer project being implemented in one of the burn areas in Larkfield. To ensure that we keep all options open, we will be learning more about this project and whether it might serve as a model for some properties on Fitch Mountain sometime in the future. The FMA Septicians will, of course, keep you posted on all of this as things progress. If you have questions or comments, contact Pat Abercrombie at patabercrombie@comcast.net.

[Editor's Note: Aren't you glad that we have somebody willing to delve into wastewater issues for us? Better him than me! And thank you, Pat!]

Update on the Fitch Mountain Park and Open Space Preserve

by Kate Symonds, FMA Trustee

The Fitch Mountain Park and Open Space Preserve (Preserve) is a 173-acre public property that encompasses the entire 991-foot peak of Fitch Mountain and most of its upper surrounding slopes. After a few decades in the making, in November 2014, Fitch Mountain was finally purchased as a public park and open space preserve. In the following 3 years, until the City of Healdsburg was prepared to take ownership responsibilities of the Preserve, the local conservation organization LandPaths took ownership and was contracted to manage the Preserve. Through its staff and well-organized volunteer events, LandPaths reduced nonnative invasive plants and woody fuels to lower wildfire risk, performed erosion control and trail maintenance, and installed interim trail signs. They also provided limited public access, although ongoing informal trail access had occurred for decades and continued to do so.

As planned, the City of Healdsburg (City) took ownership of the Preserve in November 2017, following completion of the Preserve Management Plan (*link address below*).

<http://www.ci.healdsburg.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/8231>

With it now open to legal public access, no immediately obvious changes have occurred other than the installation of a trailhead sign at the formal entrance at the lower parking lot of the Villa Chanticleer, and some possible uptick in trail use. Off-leash dogs are still common on the Preserve, although some owners are keeping them leashed, in accordance with City (and County) ordinance. Mountain biking use appears to remain very low. FMA President Pat Abercrombie works with a small volunteer group to further reduce woody fuels in the Preserve in coordination with and supplemental to LandPaths' efforts.

As described in the Fitch Mountain Management Plan, the City is slated to convene a stakeholder group made up of various public access user groups, the FMA, and others with a "stake" in what's going on in the Preserve. The group would provide a forum for information sharing and identification of issues and solutions. A few meeting dates were proposed in the summer of 2018, but the City was unable to find a date that worked for most involved. We anticipate the City will convene a stakeholder group sometime in 2019, dates TBD. When the City's Park Superintendent, Jaime Licea, was recently asked if his office had received any complaints regarding the Preserve (for which a stakeholder group would be an appropriate forum to involve), he indicated that none have been received or known.

The Preserve Management Plan also calls for improving access to the Preserve from the formal entrance at the Villa Chanticleer. As of December 2018, the City continues to work with its consultant on the Design and Construction Drawings (DCD) for this Preserve entrance. To this date, staff has reviewed the DCD Plans, which are undergoing final edits by the consultant with the hope of breaking ground in the summer of 2019.

In continuance of the capable service that LandPaths offers, the City has entered into a 2-year comprehensive contract with LandPaths for management and stewardship of Fitch Mountain Preserve and the Healdsburg Ridge Open Space Preserve. They will continue to provide workdays on a monthly basis (the second Saturday of the month for FM) with volunteers and see to it that the Management Plan action items for each Preserve are delivered in a timely fashion.

The FMA currently does not have a standing Preserve Committee, but an ad hoc committee would be formed as a need arises. We were very active in providing input in the planning stages of the Preserve Management Plan, and we will continue to do so as part of a stakeholder group described above. We strongly encourage participation in LandPaths' stewardship days on the mountain for an invigorating, rewarding experience with the camaraderie of other Preserve supporters. For questions or comments regarding the Fitch Mountain Preserve and FMA, contact Kate Symonds at kate@terraserve.net.

COPE (Citizens Organized to Prepare for Emergencies) Year in Review

2018 was a very productive year for the COPE program here on Fitch Mountain (FM) and in northern Sonoma County. COPE programs are popping up everywhere as our communities come to understand the critical importance of mobilizing around emergency preparedness. The Camp Fire involving Paradise was another wake-up call to all of us! We have formed the Northern Sonoma County COPE Leadership group that meets monthly (fire officials, COPE leaders, etc.). Here are some of the things we have accomplished this year:

- Created COPE video — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kl2lZn9Qnm4>
- Developed COPE 101 curriculum and materials for new COPE groups
- Completed our FM CWPP (Community Wildfire Protection Plan)
- Edited COPE documents to better reflect the needs of our community, including the survey to include vacation rentals, full-time rentals, family cabins, etc.).
- Created Preattack and Community maps for FM and other communities, by Chief Turbeville with input from COPE. This will enable firefighters from outside the area to find houses and streets not on county maps, ID evacuation routes and fire roads, etc. Eventually, information gathered from COPE will be on these maps so that emergency personnel can better help residents during an emergency.
- Met with Assembly member Wood and Supervisor Gore to discuss emergency preparedness resources for Fitch Mountain.

Other cool stuff related to emergency preparedness that happened:

- Tested Long Range Acoustical System (siren and voice system)
- Offered numerous educational opportunities such as: 3-day “Living with Fire” Symposium at SSU; Supervisor Gore’s ongoing Resiliency meetings; UCCE “Before Fire Strikes” held at Shone Farm; Home Hardening and Defensible Space sessions for Healdsburg/FM.
- Installed Fire Cameras: <http://www.alertwildfire.org/northbay/index.html>
- Tested WEA (Wireless Emergency Alert), SoCo Alert, and the federal alert systems.
- Increased inspections of improved and unimproved parcels on FM with more enforcement. There is now more funding to provide abatement and enforcement in the coming year.
- Continued to offer the chipping program.

We have many more projects planned for 2019, including educational opportunities, improved signage (fire danger, parking, and evacuation), and improved emergency communication. (Radios, siren, etc., are all being evaluated.)

We saw over and over again in these devastating fires how neighbor helping neighbor was key to saving lives. Have you joined COPE? If not, we strongly urge you to fill out the survey and learn how you can be better prepared in an emergency. Go to the FMA website for a link to the survey and much more! (*See page 8.*)

—Priscilla Abercrombie, COPE Co-Chair



CSA41- Fitch Water Advisory Report

by Donita Proctor and Pat Abercrombie, Co-Chairs

The meter replacement project began 10/23/2018. Preparation for changeout began with cleaning/vacuuming the interiors of the current meter boxes and checking for leaks/problems on the customer side of the current meter. The Russian River Utility (RRU) created a project plan that mapped out five zones around the mountain. They began on Redwood Drive and upper No. Fitch Mountain Rd. and as of December 28, there were 150 meters out of 337 completed. The project has an expected completion date of March 2019. In cases where difficulties arise in changing out the old meter, the site will be set aside; the difficult cases will be handled after the team has made an initial pass through all five zones.

At our December 4th advisory meeting with So. Co. Transportation and Public Works (TPW), staff reported that when a leak is found, customers are notified by a knock on the door and a note. This will be followed up by a letter from the County. To date, your committee has not seen the notification letter that was developed by RRU and approved by County staff. We are told that the leaks that are being found were not detectable by the old meters, which had lost their sensitivity to a slow, consistent leak of water. Customers should receive a letter in the next two billings reminding us that the new meters are much more efficient and may be registering water usage that was not detected by the old meters.

The initial testing of data transfer for billing was conducted on Dec. 7th on just four of the first new meters. We do not yet have a report on the results. TPW staff were assured at the vendor presentation that despite difficult cell phone coverage on parts of the mountain, this system will work.

The good news is that once the system is up and running you can check your water usage by smartphone or computer. You will have more accurate and up-to-date information to help identify when you might have a leak.



Fire Hydrants

The Russian River Utility distributed a schedule for hydrant maintenance at the committee's request. The hydrants are grouped in four zones. One zone will be pressure-tested each quarter through a subset of hydrants. The entire system will be pressure-tested annually. By rotation within each zone, every hydrant will be tested every 4 years. This process will begin with the first quarter 2019.

*Woo Hoo! Yippee!
and other exclamations
of excitement ...*

CSA#41-Fitch Bond Payoff

When you received your Sonoma County Property Tax bill recently, did you notice charges for CSA#41 Zn24 Fitch Mt. WTR were missing? The loan contract # E58221 under the State Safe Drinking Water Bond is **PAID IN FULL**. The last payment of \$380,019.67 was sent in early June.

With this payoff of the State Safe Drinking Water loan for the water system, your annual taxes have been reduced by \$323.00.

WDAC meeting schedule 2019

March 6, 2019

June 5, 2019

September 4, 2019

December 4, 2019

Advisory committee contacts

Donita: 431-8789

Pat: 473-8217



**Meter Guys
at Work**

Del Rio Woods Report

This time last year, Del Rio was closed and surrounded by chain-link fence while the old shed, picnic tables, mis-matched signs, and tired landscaping were being carefully removed to make way for the lovely “new” park now nestled in our neighborhood. The flow-through parking lot now includes far fewer booby traps waiting to jump out and scratch your fender. The big-leaf maple trees, irrigated by overflow from the jug-fillers, are growing rapidly and should begin to shade the new picnic tables this summer. The rest of the landscaping is native and will be filling in before you know it. There are still a couple of projects to fund; hopefully Measure M approved in November will help. With the help of Regional Parks and our dedicated band of volunteer loppers, we’re keeping the Arundo at the top of the beach under control. We hope to see you at Del Rio in 2019.

—Pat Abercrombie

Fire Prevention

After seven months of effort, three public workshops, and untold hours of volunteer time, our Community Wildfire Prevention Plan (CWPP) is near completion. The final draft is undergoing proofreading and last-minute edits and will be circulated to relevant government and neighborhood entities for signature during January. The purpose of the CWPP was for residents of the area working with involved agencies (County government, Cal Fire, Healdsburg City Fire) to identify fire risks within the community and collaboratively propose ways to mitigate the identified risks. FMA plans to use the CWPP as a basis for applying for grant monies for risk reduction projects on Fitch Mountain during the coming months.

—Ken Hite

**For details, archives, and updates
on everything FMA, go to**

[http:// www.FitchMtn.org](http://www.FitchMtn.org)



And it is for mail-in only. If you want to process a new membership via the internet, you can do so easily at the FMA website (<http://www.FitchMtn.org>). If mailing, send form and check to: Fitch Mountain Association; P.O. Box 1233; Healdsburg, CA 95448. If paying with cash, please give it in person to the Treasurer (*see pg. 2*).

Name: _____

#	Street	City	State	ZIP
---	--------	------	-------	-----

Fitch Mountain Address (if different): _____

#	Street
---	--------

Email: _____ Phone (optional): _____

Type of Membership: ☐ New

Dues are \$20 per voting member.

Number of memberships being paid: _____

Names of the members:

Members x \$20 each: \$ _____

I'd like to make an additional donation of: \$

(Thank you for your support!)

Total enclosed: \$

What are your Fitch Mountain concerns?