



File Code: 1950

Date:

Dear Interested Members of the Public:

The Angeles National Forest (ANF) is preparing an Environmental Assessment to analyze the effects of private landowners doing wildland fire hazard reduction on National Forest System (NFS) lands to create defensible space around their homes. This analysis would allow private landowners to treat up to 100 feet of fuel hazard (and on selected parcels up to 200 feet) as required by Los Angeles County Fire Code 317.2.3. Landowners in San Bernardino County would be able to treat up to 100 feet of fuel hazard as required by Title 2 of County Code, Section: 23.034.

As of 1996, Los Angeles County required an approved fuels modification plan (<http://www.fire.lacounty.gov/forestry/FuelModificationPlan.asp>) for new residential construction. These approved plans addressed defensible space for new construction and therefore, the Forest Service is proposing in Los Angeles County that homes built prior to 1996 or homes without an existing fuel modification plan, would be eligible for a permit to extend defensible space onto NFS lands; and homes built after 1996 will be considered for a permit if needed on a case by case basis.

### **Background**

Nationally, the highest losses in property and life caused by wildfire occur in southern California, while at the same time people continue to build homes adjacent to fire-prone landscapes such as ANF.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) and Office of the State Fire Marshall (OSFM) have designated private lands within and adjacent to the ANF as Very High Hazard Severity Zones. This rating signifies that these parcels are at the highest risk of having a wildfire impact to their homes. Two sources of risk from a wildfire are the flaming front and embers (or firebrands) that travel far beyond the flaming front of a wildfire and pose a risk of ignition to a structure and adjacent vegetation. Both these sources of risk can be addressed by the landowner "hardening" the home through compliance with local building codes and through managing vegetation to meet Los Angeles County and San Bernardino County hazard reduction for defensible space.

Based on historic wildfire activity in the areas immediately adjacent to the administrative boundary of the ANF, there is a high probability that wildfire will burn within the defined areas of the forest (see map) creating a significant threat to life and property. The risk of catastrophic wildfire for private residences within 100-feet of the ANF is high due to the condition and nature



of vegetation on private and National Forest System (NFS) lands. Residents immediately adjacent to the forest are at risk from wildfire due to the presence of highly flammable vegetation, weather conditions conducive to wildfire spread, and multiple wildfire ignition sources.

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose and need for this action is to reduce the potential impacts from wildfire for private residences up to 100-feet of the ANF administrative boundary, in accordance with Los Angeles County Fire Code 317.2.3 and in accordance with Title 2 of the San Bernardino County Code Section: 23.034.

There is also a need to protect the flora and fauna of the ANF from unplanned ignitions originating from communities and structures adjacent to the Forest.

Additionally there is a need to enhance firefighter and public safety by creating additional wildfire “defensible space” in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas adjacent to the Forest. This enhanced defensible space will provide firefighters safer locations from which to suppress wildfires and provide for the protection of improvements on private and NFS lands.

This action is consistent with the 2005 ANF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), Part 2, ANF Strategy, Fire 2 – Direct Community Protection and Fire 4 – Firefighter and Public Safety; pages 127 and 129.

### **Proposed Action**

The proposed action to meet the purpose and need would authorize private landowners to cut or thin vegetation on NFS lands within 100-feet of their habitable structure to create a Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) Defense Zone<sup>1</sup> as described in the Forest Plan. Outbuildings, such as storage sheds, animal enclosures, etc., do not qualify as protected structures. No actions may be taken on NFS land without prior authorization from the Forest Service.

Activities proposed to be authorized include hand cutting and thinning vegetation and either chipping the trimmed vegetation in place or removing it to locations off NFS land for disposal. Root crowns of cut and mowed vegetation will remain intact. Thus, some maintenance of the treated area will be necessary because of sprouting vegetation. All cutting and thinning of vegetation will be done with hand tools, (chainsaws, loppers, brush hooks, etc). Disturbance to NFS land will be primarily from trampling of vegetation from people walking over the site and the removal and thinning of vegetation using hand tools. No intentional digging or scraping of the topsoil will be authorized under this proposed action. Tractors, masticators, bulldozers, or other mobile heavy equipment that would scrape the soil or would cause the removal of root systems of shrubs by snagging and dragging will not be allowed. No prescribed burning will be approved with this proposed action.

The vegetation treatments will be divided into 2 zones (Figure 1). The first zone will include the areas within 0 to 100 feet of any home. Within the private property boundaries, landowners will comply with local County fuel modification guidelines. On NFS lands, a light cover of herbaceous vegetation, no taller than 4-6 inches in height, may be retained within this zone. No

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<sup>1</sup> A WUI Defense Zone is the area directly adjoining structures and evacuation routes that is converted to a less-flammable state to increase defensible space and firefighter safety. This is considered a direct protection buffer.

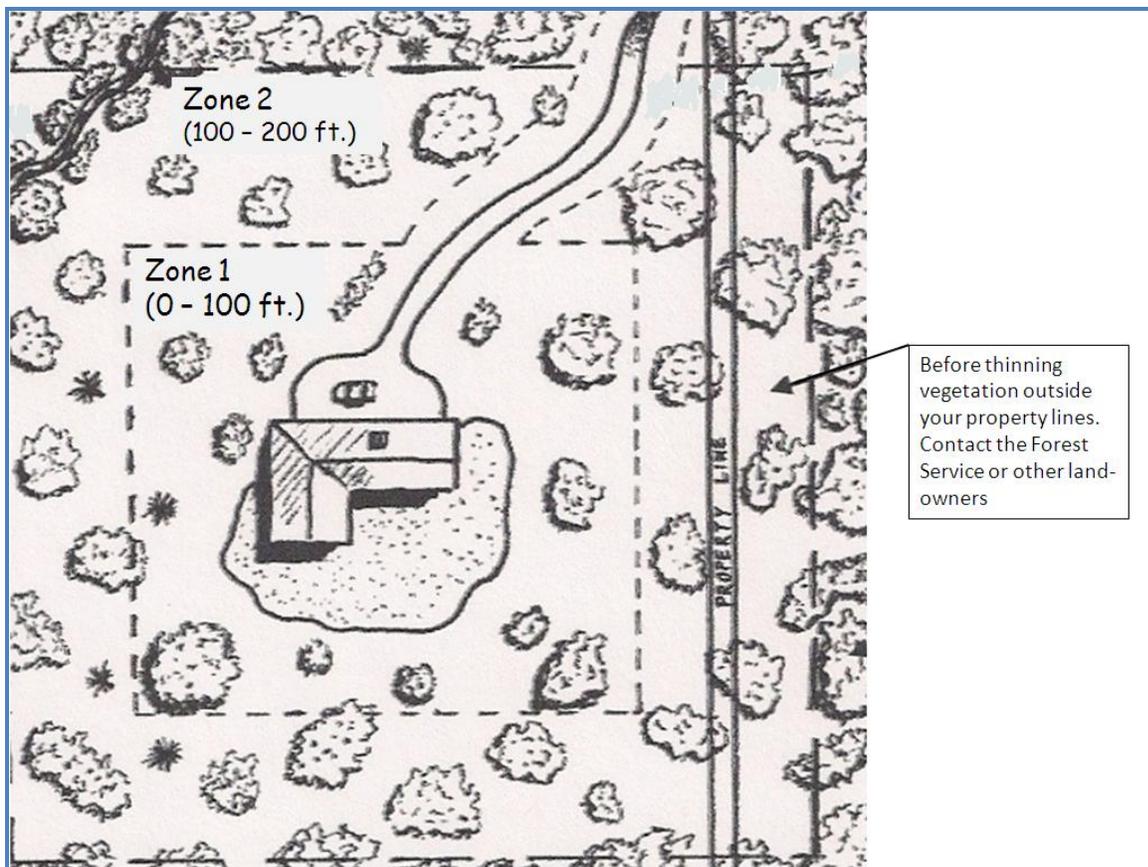
planting of new plants or seeds, whether native or non-native species, and no ground disturbance of any kind, will be allowed on NFS lands.

Individual shrub or tree specimens may also be retained within the 0 to 100-foot zone, as long as there is a minimum cleared area between specimens of at least one and one-half times the height of the specimen. Trees retained within this zone must be limbed to a height of 6 feet for mature trees or up to 1/3 the height of young trees, to remove ladder fuels.

The second zone will be between 100 to 200 feet from the home. In this zone, the native vegetation should be retained but it must be thinned by 50%. That is, no more than 50% of the vegetative cover over 18 inches tall will be allowed to remain intact. Individual shrub or tree specimens may be retained as long as there is a minimum cleared area between specimens equal to the height of each specimen. Trees may also be retained after limbing to a height of 6 feet for mature trees or 1/3 the height of young trees. All dead and dying vegetation within this zone will be removed.

Grass and other vegetation located more than 100 feet from buildings or structures and less than 18 inches in height above the ground need not be removed in order to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion.

Figure 1



A WUI Defense Zone map has been developed by the ANF and will be the source of information concerning which structures/parcel may seek authority to do wildfire hazard mitigation work on

National Forest System lands. This Defense Zone map will include all structures in the Forest and structures on private land within 200 feet of the Forest administrative boundary. To view the map, go to [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/angeles/project-listing](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/angeles/project-listing)

### **How to Comment**

Your input, particularly at this phase in evaluating this proposed action, plays a key role in the process of determining if there are alternatives to the proposal. All comments are encouraged.

If you wish to comment on this proposal and/or to be kept on the mailing list for the **Defensible Space Project**, please send your written comments to:

**Defensible Space Project  
Attn: Diane Travis  
Angeles National Forest  
701 N. Santa Anita Ave  
Arcadia, CA 91006-2725**

Please submit your comments by March 18, 2011. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Diane Travis at (760)249-6005.

Sincerely,

MARTY DUMPIS  
Acting Forest Supervisor

cc: James Hall, Lisa A Northrop, Sherry Rollman, Sonja Bergdahl, Mike McIntyre, LTanga Watson, Wilburn M Blount