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COMMENTS ON PROPOSED MONTEREY DEFENSIBLE FUELS PROFILE ZONE (DFPZ) PROJECT

Steve Chambers, local resident

August 10, 2001

Dear ACT 2 staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Monterey DFPZ project. Allowing the public to comment, on this proposal, is much different than the complete exclusion of public involvement during the past three catastrophic fires on the Monterey District, LPNF.

The exclusion of natural fire from areas and increasingly frequent catastrophic fires in other areas of the northern Santa Lucia mountains has created a complex, difficult, expensive and potentially fatal situation. I feel that this proposal attempts to resolve these problems.

The comments made below are offered to assist with the success of the proposed Monterey DFPZ project.

FUNDING The proposal calls for implementation to begin in October, 2001 and continue for ten years. District staffing is currently increasing with expected year around personnel available to implement the fall - winter - spring portions of the proposal. But, based on the past decade of bare bones non fire season staffing, the proposal needs to be designed so that it will continue even when Monterey District staffing again drops to below minimum levels.

CREDIBILITY Many locals recall the ³South coast Fuel Break² of the 1980's: labeled a ³boondoggle², ³ nightmare², and such. One acknowledged failure was the creation of a corridor, from the coastal strip up slopes to the high ridges, which allowed the spread of exotic plants. This corridor (fuel break) has allowed hundreds of acres of French broom to become established. This continues to be an insolvable problem. French broom has spread rapidly in the Nacimiento - Cone Peak Roads area after the 1999 Kirk Complex Fires. Please design and implement all elements of the proposed Monterey DFPZ project to reduce or eliminate the establishment or spread of exotic plant species.

HAZARD REDUCTION One important stated purpose of this proposal is to ³Protect highly valuable real estate within and adjacent to the National Forest boundary.² Equally important is the creation of a mandatory hazard

reduction program, in Monterey County, modeled on the existing successful program in Ventura County. A reduction in real estate loss, due to wildfire, will only be realized when a vigorous hazard reduction program is implemented.

ROADS & VEHICLE ACCESS Past fire records show that >80% of unplanned ignitions occur along or adjacent to roads on the District. Please consider reducing or restricting vehicle access to parts or all of the District when fire danger ratings reach predetermined high levels.

FIRE PERMITS are required by all Forest users who build a legal campfire or use a stove during fire season. Unfortunately there is little to no enforcement due to a lack of personnel. Please increase fire permit compliance by increasing personnel or redirecting staffing assignments.

EDUCATION Success of the Monterey DFPZ proposal will require a vigorous and proactive educational effort to inform locals of the benefits in the design and implementation of the proposed project. Of highest importance is promoting the fact that this proposed project is an attempt to avoid or reduce the "war zone" type management of the past three catastrophic fires on the Monterey District, LPNF. As District staffing is limited, consider using knowledgeable and supportive local (ideally from the same watershed or sub watershed) volunteers to explain and receive feedback as all phases of the proposed project move forward. Members of adjacent volunteer fire departments would be one source of these outreach people.

SITE SPECIFIC COMMENTS

ARROYO

1. Consider that the currently closed road Indians - Arroyo Seco Road (I-AS) might, in the future, be decommissioned. An Environmental Assessment (EA) is proposed, on road maintenance, during FY 2001-2002 or FY 2002-2003. The road will not be reopened or reconstructed until this EA is completed.
2. Populations of Arroyo Seco bush mallow, a LPNF listed sensitive plant species, are present at numerous locations along the I-AS road. Please conduct a survey, using approved protocol, to identify all locations of this plant, and then design and implement whatever protections are necessary.
3. Hanging Valley has extensive cultural resources. They need to be surveyed and protected from adverse impacts due to wild or managed fire.
4. Removal of vegetation, either by fire or other means, on the excessively steep slopes above and below most of the I-AS Road will likely increase landslides, slipouts, washouts, and increase sediment delivery to the Arroyo Seco River. The Arroyo Seco River is home to the only remnant population of the once enormous Salinas River steelhead run. Please design and implement the Monterey DFPZ so that steelhead are not adversely impacted.
5. Star thistle occurs at many locations within the roadway of the I-AS Road, and is being spread by each maintenance or reconstruction event. Please design and implement the Monterey DFPZ to reduce or eliminate these noxious exotic plants.
6. The Arroyo Seco River is a candidate for WILD designation under the Wild

and Scenic Rivers Act. The Act requires that the Arroyo Seco River be managed as WILD while awaiting a decisions. Please design and implement the Arroyo section of the Monterey DFPZ to reflect this required management direction.

CARMEL Creating buffers between the Forest and private property in the Ponciano Ridge areas is supported. This area needs fuels reductions to slow the spread of unplanned ignitions. Please design and implement the Carmel section of the Monterey DFPZ so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established. Please design and implement the Carmel element of the proposed Monterey DFPZ project so that illegal ORV - OHV use is not able to be established or is reduced and/or eliminated.

CONE

1. As noted above French broom is spreading along the Cone Peak Road, especially since the 1999 Kirk Complex Fires. Please design and implement the Cone section of the Monterey DFPZ so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.
2. Local knowledge has been aware, for many years, of the Cone Peak Road being used by dope growers to access the areas on both sides and north of the road. Consider restricting vehicle access on the Cone Peak Road, to reduce the attendant adverse impacts, including unplanned ignitions, caused by dope growers.

MANUEL

1. Parts of this section have been reopened by re-bulldozing existing fire lines during all of the large fires over the past decades, resulting in a long excessively disturbed strip of land. Please design and implement the Manuel element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project to reduce or eliminate the too frequent dozing of this strip.
2. Please design and implement the Manuel element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.

PARK

1. Another WILD section of the Arroyo Seco River lies next to the southern half of the I-AS Road between Escondido and Memorial Park Campgrounds. Please design and implement the Park section of the Monterey DFPZ to reflect the management direction required by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
2. The proposed DFPZs around Escondido and Memorial Park Campgrounds are needed. Please consider working with the cabin owners of the adjacent recreational residence summer home tract on any needed hazard reduction and or fuel breaks. Please design and implement this part of the Park section of the Monterey DFPZ to be aesthetically pleasing, while reducing the potential loss of campgrounds, historic structures, and recreational residences.
3. Please design and implement the Park element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.
4. The amount of illegal roadways and resultant illegal fire rings in the San Antonio drainage of the Park unit increases each year. Please plan to close all illegal roads and remove all illegal fire rings in the area. A

continuing level of monitoring for illegal OHV use and illegal campfires will be necessary.

PINEY

1. Some experts feel that high frequency burning increase the spread of exotic plant species. Please design and implement the Piney element of the Monterey DFPZ so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.
2. Illegal ORV - OHV activity has been a problem within this unit. Please design and implement the Piney element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project so that illegal ORV - OHV use is reduced or eliminated.

RELIZ is the black hole of the District. Nothing, as far as the public is concerned comes from it: no knowledge, no access, no awareness, no support, nor education. Essentially locked up public lands which only benefit adjacent property owners.

RIDGE

1. This unit will continue to be the most important defense to the spread of wildfire into the areas of excessively expensive real estate of the Big Sur coast. Please remind the Big Sur locals that this proposed project is an attempt to reduce the excessive damage frequently caused during wildfire suppression efforts. Please design and implement the Ridge element of the Monterey DFPZ to be aesthetically pleasing, while reducing the potential loss of excessively expensive Big Sur real estate.
2. Please work with locals to educate, on an ongoing basis, and gain acceptance of the design and implementation of the Ridge unit. Remind locals of what happens when wildfire is burning toward them.
3. Please design and implement the Ridge element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.

SKINNER

1. Please design and implement the Skinner element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.
2. Please consider the negative aspects of potentially opening access points from the Forest onto adjacent private property.

TASSAJARA

1. Base map note: Wildcat Camp is shown twice, adjacent to the southern parts of this unit. Please remove the most southern Wildcat Camp and associated trail (leads to the northwest and is forked) as they do not exist at that location.
2. Removal of vegetation, either by fire or other means, on the excessively steep slopes above and below major parts of the Tassajara Road will likely cause an increase in landslides, slipouts, washouts, and increase sediment delivery into tributaries of the Arroyo Seco River. The Arroyo Seco River and its tributary Tassajara Creek is home to the only remnant population of the once enormous Salinas River steelhead run. Please design and implement the Monterey DFPZ so that steelhead are not adversely impacted.
3. The Church Creek area contains large areas of rich cultural resources.

Please design and implement this portion of the Tassajara unit of the proposed Monterey DFPZ project so that these elements are not adversely impacted.

4. Please design and implement the Tassajara element of the Monterey DFPZ proposed project so that exotic plants do not spread nor new species become established.

4. The proposed DFPZs around White Oaks (not mapped) and China Camp Campgrounds are needed. Please consider working with the owners of the adjacent private residences on any needed hazard reduction and or fuel breaks. Please design and implement this part of the Tassajara section of the Monterey DFPZ to be aesthetically pleasing, while reducing the potential loss of campgrounds, and private residences.

I intend to continue supporting the design and implementation of the proposed Monterey DFPZ project. Please continue to notify me of any and all opportunities for involvement.

Sincerely,

Steve Chambers,