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From: Jennifer Cochrane-Schultz <jen.schultz702@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 28, 2016 6:01 PM
To: Vegetation Treatment Program@BOF
Cc: Deanna Spehn; naturalist@californiachaparral.org
Subject: Vegetation Treatment Program

To whom it may concern:

My name is Jennifer Cochrane-Schultz. I am a native Californian, raised by a native Californian who wished he could have been the first white man to see San Francisco Bay before its natural beauty was completely destroyed by development and pollution.

I share my father's view of things. Where is "resource-rich"

California now that the loggers, farmers, ranchers, dam builders, oil drillers, and canal diggers have had their way with her? Certainly, humans have a place in this state. The question is, how much more damage will be done--especially by well-meaning agencies such as yours that propose the destruction of millions of acres of habitat, all in the name of fire safety.

I know a thing or two about fires. We survived the 2003 Cedar fire here in San Diego and the Angora fire in South Lake Tahoe just a few years later. We were evacuated both times. Thankfully our homes were not destroyed. Many others were however, and we've listened to and reflected on a great deal of reporting and recommendations regarding the best way to protect ourselves from future fires. Everything said and done, here are my own conclusions.

1. Firebreaks are ineffective. The Cedar Fire jumped across several multi-lane concrete highways as it burned its way around and about San Diego County. We drove up to a high vantage point in Tierrasanta before we evacuated. The wall of fire we observed moving across the Miramar military reservation towards SR 52 and Tierrasanta was an awesome site to behold. Given the wind conditions, there was no way that the highway would serve as a fire break.
2. People build houses made of fire-friendly materials in dangerous, fire-friendly places. A good friend of mine is a boat builder living in South Lake Tahoe. He lived at the edge of the community that was most heavily damaged by the Angora fire. He built a wood deck surrounding his home--despite building codes that prevent that sort of thing. And he stored his hand-made wooden boats underneath his neighbor's wood deck next door. No surprises there. His place and most of those surrounding him all burned down. Tierrasanta friends who lost homes at the edge of our community kept wood patio furniture and other combustible materials on their patios interfacing directly with the canyon. They lost their home, as did those directly adjacent to theirs.
3. Intentionally created fire breaks designed to block future fires result in the growth of fire-loving weeds. In San Diego we are seeing a proliferation of Russian Thistle, fountain grasses and mustard on hillsides where city brush crews have been "thinning" to protect homes from future fires. Weeds do burn--generally faster and "better" than the native brush which is fire resistant. And yes, I've also experienced brush fires, and canyon fires, and was trapped on a train (with a dome car so we could watch the whole thing transpire) in the middle of a forest fire when I was a child. The train tracks didn't stop the fire. And the fire breaks we are desperately creating here in San Diego County won't stop a wind-driven fire either. Even ice-plant--the urban canyon dweller's last line of defense--will burn as was observed during the north county fires last summer.
4. Backfires and 'controlled burns' often backfire. How many millions of acres burned in New Mexico when a backfire got out of control? Back fires were set near my home to try and stop the South Lake Tahoe Angora fire. Tahoe is famous for its afternoon lake breezes. And sure enough, the backfire quickly spread up into the trees, creating a crown fire that came within feet of entering another settlement of homes. Your agency recently started a controlled burn in a

remote area of San Diego County--ostensibly to protect Julian and surrounding communities. What happened instead is that the planned 700 acre fire quickly grew to 2700 acres, destroying some of our most precious native chaparral.

What works? Possibly nothing. I'm not sure why we have such a hard time grasping the reality of fire in our environment. We spend millions of dollars each year trying to protect ourselves from fires.

We are cutting things down, digging stuff up, and prescribe-burning what little is left of old California. True, it won't burn now. But what's the point? Might as well move to New Jersey if that's the kind of place you want to live in.

I grew up on the edge of a canyon surrounded by towering eucalyptus trees and huge oaks. I currently reside on the edge of a canyon in Tierrasanta's dedicated open space where we enjoy viewing the cottonwoods, sycamore trees, willows, toyon, sumac and all of the associated mammal, reptile and bird species with depend on that habitat. I serve on the community council and on our open space committee. We've listened to hours of reports about fire safety. The bottom line is always the same. It all goes back to how we build our homes--what we plant in our gardens--and a good exit strategy when the next fire inevitably comes.

And that's where I think your agency should be focusing its energy and budget--on educating communities and addressing building codes instead of mowing, mulching, chopping, paving and burning down what's left of California's native habitats. And if you insist on moving forward with this ill-conceived vegetation plan, then by all means take to heart the recommendations of the California Native Plant Society, the California Fish and Wildlife Agency, and the Chaparral Institute.

Every plant and animal is precious and just as much a resident of California as you all or I.

Sincerely,
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