

THE LOS TRANCOS COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

FIRE SAFETY INITIATIVE

AS APPROVED BY BOARD ON

SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

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LTCWD FIRE SAFETY INITIATIVE

SUMMARY

There's a central recurring theme to fire safety in our neighborhood:

Reduce the amount of fuel that wind-driven fire storm has available to it and you will reduce the speed in which a fire can spread, increase the likelihood of escape and increase the possibilities for controlling the fire before damage can become wide spread.

The set of projects that comprise this initiative use fuel load reduction as the primary means by which we can reduce the risk wild fire poses to life and property within our district. We focus first on fuels around roads that pose a threat to the orderly evacuation our neighborhood, the greatest risk to life. We then look at fuel load reduction within the community. These efforts are the focus of this initiative for its first year.

Road safety is mostly an intergovernmental problem we will manage in cooperation with the owner's of the escape routes, San Mateo County and Portola Valley and to a lesser extent, Palo Alto. A few private land owners will also be involved in resolving this issue.

We will attack the fuel load problem within the community by raising awareness of the problem and working collaboratively with individual homeowners and the Woodside Fire Protection District. This initiative will provide education and expert advice, point the way to competent contractors, and provide discount programs and targeted incentives.

In our first year we propose to recruit and coordinate a team of neighborhood volunteers to further refine and execute a set of projects to achieve our goals. Countless hours of volunteer time will be used. \$18,000 has already been budgeted for studies and assessments.

The remaining budget for this initiative is broken out by item number on page 12. At its Sept 4, 2008 meeting the district's board approved an additional \$100,000 to fund items 1-10. This funding will be generally available for work completed in our July 1, 2008 - Jun 30, 2009 fiscal year. Depending on a range of issues, the program may or may not be continued into future years. The board reserves the right to reformulate incentives, reduce or add to the program even in its first year. (Note: funding for item 11 on page 12 is anticipated once the task is further refined.)

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In early 2006 the Los Trancos Water District polled its residents to see how they wanted the District to spend its time and resources. 82% of the residents identified emergency preparedness as important or very important. It was the resident's #1 priority. At its June 2008 meeting the District Board approved a resolution for a new initiative in fire safety for the District's residents. This set of proposals flows directly from a presentation made at that meeting.

HOW OUR WATER DISTRICT IS INVOLVED IN FIRE SAFETY

This initiative is within our District's charter for two reasons:

- In 1954 our district was founded to deliver water and remove waste water including storm water run off from the Los Trancos Woods area and from the lands that would eventually become Vista Verde. Should an "Oakland Hills" style fire ever occur here the damage to the watershed, our natural storm water management system, could be difficult if not impossible to overcome. Our initiative will work to reduce this risk.
- By protecting our neighborhood from wild fire threat, we protect our water distribution infrastructure.

Two memos from our District's council on this matter are included as appendix A

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended for the use by those that will be working on planning and approving the initiative.

WHAT'S NOT COVERED

This plan does not address what the residents should do during a fire emergency, e.g., what to take in an evacuation, radio communications, first aid. These functions are being well handled by our two chapters of CERPP, Citizens Emergency Response Preparedness Program. This plan does not duplicate these homeowner association activities nor is it on conflict with them. It is strongly supported by them.

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PROJECT 1: PROTECTING THE EVACUATION ROUTES

Assuring residents can use the neighborhood's roadways to evacuate and that emergency services can use them to enter will first require us to make a survey of the road system to identify problem areas, areas where trees and brush create a fire hazard. We will review not just the San Mateo County roads within our community, but the two public paths to safety (Los Trancos Road and Alpine Road). The Pony Tracks Ranch also has a private road to Page Mill that is available for ingress and egress of emergency vehicles.

State law requires the responsible governmental entities to clear an area 10' to either side of a public road. In some areas this is not enough. On the downhill side of a road that traverses a slope, flame fronts which burn up to the roadway will, at least partially, blow horizontally across the road. This could potentially eliminate an escape route or worse create a dangerous situation where a column of fleeing vehicles is trapped and burned.

Lands in the public right of way

Our public paved roads include a strip of land on each side known as the public right of way. This typically extends 10' outward on either side of the pavement. Brush suppression in this area is required by state law.

We will proceed as follows:

- 1) Members of our committee will first seek to have these areas cleared by the responsible governmental entity at its cost. These entities could include the following: a) the County of San Mateo – for roads within the community, b) the Town of Portola Valley – for Alpine and Los Trancos Roads, our primary escape routes and c) the City of Palo Alto, for portions of Los Trancos Road that are in Santa Clara County.
- 2) If this effort should meet with resistance, our task force will work to reach an agreement with the applicable governmental entity with some cost sharing, or, as a last resort, permission so that we can contract for and complete the work required.
- 3) We will seek to put in place procedures by which these brush clearing projects are maintained on an annual basis.

Private lands bordering the public right of way – *item #1*

As indicated above, some times 10' is not enough. In many cases proper road safety will require some brush clearing on private land adjacent to the public right of way. In these cases our task force will work with land owners to reach an agreement where the lands are cleared at the District's expense.

Budget/restrictions: \$20,000 for both public and private land in first year of program. Anticipated expenditure: \$15,000. Work to be limited to high priority areas as identified by District's designated fire safety consultant. As a cost

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saving measure, for work on public land, labor may be provided by trustee inmate crews available through WFPD.

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PROJECT 2: FUEL LOAD REDUCTION WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY

For us to achieve a real reduction in our risk to wild-land fire, we must reduce fuels within individual homeowner properties by clearing brush, removing “ladder fuels” and maintaining a 100 foot defensible space around major structures. Getting as many as possible of our 250+ homeowners to assess and take corrective actions regarding fire safety hazards on their own properties will be the key success factor for this effort, the largest and most complicated portion of this initiative.

Barriers

There are numerous barriers that may be preventing homeowners from clearing the brush and “ladder fuels” from their lands that present such a hazard in the event of a wild-land fire. For each barrier we briefly mention potential solutions that will be described in greater detail in the next section.

- Awareness: Homeowner doesn't understand that there is a problem. Solution: Education via email and web, one-on-one outreach. Message: “Problem is real, but fuel load reduction can largely solve the problem”
- Overwhelmed: Homeowner is overwhelmed by the scope of the problem. Solution: Provide consultation on a prioritization of the issues faced by the homeowner and an efficient organized means by which the required work can be completed. Messages: “We'll help you assess, prioritize and correct the problems”. “By working together we can improve safety for the entire community”
- Aesthetics: Homeowner thinks he'll have to “ugly-fy” their home/landscaping to create a fire safe environment. Solution: Education via email and web, one on one outreach. “Fire safe homes can be beautiful”
- Costs: Costs are too high. Solution: Task force to negotiate “quantity discounts” for fuel load reduction work as well as provide incentives. “Incentives and group purchase programs can make fire safety affordable.” Woodside Fire District can help homeowners prioritize work to be done so that a long range plan (like 5 years) can be started.
- Insurance: “Even the mention of a fire hazard on my property is enough to cause my insurance company to discontinue my policy or deny my claim if a fire should occur.” Solution: Education - Participation in this program is on an “opt-in” basis only. Message: “You may already have a problem because WFPD does walk-by assessments of difficult properties, and writes reports that are in the public domain. Isn't it better to find out what you can do to improve the survivability of your property and fix it, than to hope your insurance company doesn't find out?”
- Renters Vs Owners. ‘It's not my responsibility’ Solution, contact property owners with a communications education program and offer the same incentives.

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Getting the word out

The messages identified above and, to the extent appropriate, detail of the package of incentives the district can provide, are to be delivered through several channels.

Direct Mailings – This is the only channel that is guaranteed to reach every household. By virtue of this fact alone its use is required. Unfortunately it will often be difficult for these mailings to rise above the attention levels afforded common junk mail. Redundant communication channels will be required.

Yahoo Group Emails – Perhaps the “mass” communication channel that will reach the greatest percentage of our residents are the “ltwca” and, to a greater extent, the “VistaVerdeLTW” yahoo group email lists. By using these list servers it will be relatively easy to send a series of coordinated messages designed to increase awareness of and participation in the initiative.

Website – The District is soon to activate its web domain: LTCWD.ORG. This site will have several sections to it, one of which will be dedicated to the fire safety initiative. In this section, a compelling description of the area’s fire safety issues will be maintained as well as a listing of the services the district has to offer. We will also include reimbursement application forms.

YouTube – Depending on resources/volunteer talent, this task force may employ the use of YouTube videos. This channel may be particularly well suited to the delivery of locally relevant messages from fire safety consultant Ray Moritz as well as personnel from the Woodside Fire Protection District.

One on one communication - Emulating the success of the neighborhood’s Sudden Oak Death Task Force, perhaps our most effective communication channel will be an organized neighbor-to-neighbor outreach program. Our committees will organize to maximize the value of this timeless approach.

Example homes – *item #2*

Many residents could benefit from the opportunity to examine, even at a distance, landscape maintenance and design that is fire safe. We hope to work with several local homeowners to have their homes serve as examples of what can be done to increase fire safety, while retaining an aesthetically pleasing landscape. Some ways to leverage these examples include:

- Hold one or two “tour days” where the community will move from house to house and learn.
- Feature homes on a YouTube video along with other fire-safe information and tips.
- Video blog the transformation of a home from fire trap to fire-safe.

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Budget: None, but some of the incentives described below may aid in the success of this program.

Services

Enhanced chipper program – item #3

The Woodside Fire Department (WRPD) chipper program by which residents stack brush and debris by the street so that it can be chipped by WFPD personnel has been extremely successful in our neighborhood.

The District will fund additional chipper days perhaps 1 or 2 additional per year. – this approach would utilize the same chipper and operators used by WFPD

Budget: \$10,000/year. Anticipated expenditure this year \$5,000.

Brush removal/ tree trimming group purchase program. – item #4

Most service vendors are willing to provide a lower rate if the quantity of work provided is large and the marketing task largely completed for them. The task force could qualify and provide a list of contractors that could perform brush removal/tree trimming services. An unresolved problem with this approach is quantifying the amount of work to be performed in order to determine that a real discount is being provided. Clear and useful units of measure are not easily determined. Possibilities include paying “by the truck load of chipped debris” or if trees are to be removed, a standard rate based on the height or sum of all tree trunk diameters removed.

Budget/restrictions: None

Fire Safety Assessments – item #5

The District volunteers can arrange for an assessment of the homeowners property by the Woodside Fire Protection District. WFPD provides site assessments for free and has agreed to provide this service for as part of initiative program described below. If requested, volunteers will contact WFPD to initiate assessments for property owners not participating in the incentive program.

Budget/restrictions: \$0/none. This work is largely carried out by WFPD.

Incentives

The District is positioned to provide incentives that will lower the cost of fuel load reduction projects. Preference is to be given to efforts that reduce threats to the broader community.

Shake roof replacement – item #6

Homes with shake roofs add to a community’s fuel load and greatly increase the threat to other properties in the area since, once ignited, the wood shingles produce embers that can start other fires in a neighborhood. The district will

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provide up to \$2,000 in a 50%-50% cost share to partially replace any shake roof with a fire safe roof.

Budget/restrictions: \$20,000 for total community in first year of program.
Anticipated expenditure: \$12,000. Note: There are relatively few (<10%) homes in the district with shake roofs.

Removal of Eucalyptus – item #7

Eucalyptus trees present three problems in fire safety: 1) they drop more flammable debris than any other tree species, 2) because of the Lauric acid their branches contain they burn particularly hot and fast, and 3) they spread “hot” embers farther than any other tree. District will pay full price for removal up to a household maximum of \$2,500 per household.

Budget/restrictions: \$20,000 for total community in first year of program.
Anticipated expenditure: \$15,000.

Removal of SOD Killed Trees – item #8

Sudden oak death is killing many Black Oak, Coast Live Oak and Canyon Oak in our community. These SOD killed trees are usually identified by the sudden die off of the tree’s canopy, black hypoxylon cankers in the lower trunk, and brownish sometimes bleeding lesions in the lower trunk. A standing SOD killed tree presents a considerable fire hazard particularly when it still retains its dry dead leaves. District will pay full price for removal up to a household maximum of \$1,500.

Budget/restrictions: \$20,000 for total community in first year of program.
Anticipated expenditure: \$15,000. All SOD debris is to be chipped on site, or optionally, at the expense of a the land owner, trucked to a qualified disposal site

Defensible space creation – item #9

Working in cooperation with Woodside Fire, the District will publicize and make available the following offer to the first 50 homes that apply:

- A fire inspection carried out by WFPD that identifies the top priorities in fuel load reduction.
- 50%-50% cost sharing for the first \$2,000 in brush clearing/tree trimming so long as it is directly related to the top priority work recommended by the WFPD.
- Households with significant grasslands that are difficult to clear may also apply for this benefit.

Budget/restrictions: \$50,000 for total community in first year of program.
Anticipated expenditure: \$35,000.

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Low Income subsidy – *item #10*

Many of our residents live on a fixed low income. Residents with adjusted gross incomes below \$75,000 in the most recent tax year are entitled to receive double the incentive amount they would have otherwise received so long as this amount remains less than the total cost of fire safety improvements.

Budget: \$10,000. Anticipated expenditure: \$2,000. To qualify for this program the homeowner is to contact the District's recording secretary and arrange for a meeting where the homeowner is to produce his most recent IRS form 1040 and the secretary is to verify homeowner's income.

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PROJECT 3: USING LAKE WATER FOR FIRE FIGHTING

In its 2007-2008 budget, the District approved the expenditure of \$3,000 to study and possibly design a system by which water from our reservoir could be used for fire fighting. Key questions to be investigated include:

- Physically, what sort of system could WFPD or Cal Fire make use of in the event of an emergency that disabled flow to our fire hydrants?
- If a lake fed hydrant system is recommended, can existing 4" piping believed to emanate from the lake be used?
- How much will it cost to construct such a system?

Approved budget: \$3,000. Anticipated expenditure: \$3,000.

PROJECT 4: TARGETED FUEL LOAD REDUCTION IN NEIGHBORING PROPERTIES – *item #11*

To the North and West of our neighborhood lies Portola Valley's Coal Mine Ridge open space area. The area's high SOD mortality and concentration of Eucalyptus trees presents a considerable fire hazard to our community. Working in cooperation with Portola Valley, we will share in the cost of removing and/or trimming these trees, starting with the nearest trees and working down the ridge about 1,000 feet from the street (Old Spanish Trail). Most of the work will be Eucalyptus removal/trimming as the SOD kills seem to be concentrated farther north. Vehicle access will be achieved using the removable segment of fence in the new trail head constructed just west of the District's lake.

Budget/restrictions: \$15,000 for both public and private land in first year of program. Anticipated expenditure: \$15,000. As a cost saving measure, labor may be provided by trustee inmate crews available through WFPD.

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BUDGET

In many of the areas above we've assigned a budgetary and expected expenditure amount. These amounts pertain to the first year of the initiative's existence. Projects for which no funding is shown are either to be resourced completely with volunteer work or, if needed, may be funded in the next year of the initiative's existence. The budgetary numbers are summarized in the table below.

		Incentive	Household (max)	Budget (max)	Expected
1	Road safety related brush clearing	n/a	n/a	20,000	15,000
2	Example homes	n/a	n/a	0	0
3	Enhanced chipper program	n/a	n/a	10,000	5,000
4	Brush removal/tree trimming group purchase	n/a	n/a	0	0
5	Fire safety assessments	n/a	n/a	0	0
6	Shake roof replacement	50% of 1 st 4,000	2,000	20,000	12,000
7	Removal of Eucalyptus	100%	2,500	20,000	15,000
8	Removal of SOD killed trees	100%	1,500	20,000	15,000
9	Defensible space creation	50% of 1 st 2,000	1,000	50,000	35,000
10	Low income Subsidy	double	Double or cost of work	10,000	2,000
11	Targeted fuel load reductions in neighboring communities	n/a	n/a	15,000	15,000
	Total			165,000	114,000

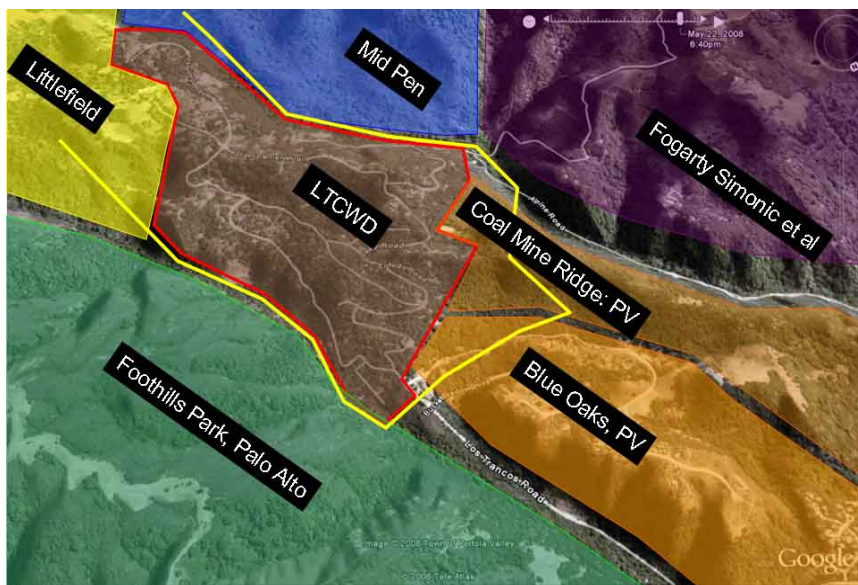
As noted above, at its Sep 4, 2008 meeting the budget approved \$100,000 for items 1 - 10. This amount is in addition to the \$15,000 already budgeted for fire safety consultation and 3,000 budgeted to investigate use of lake water for fire fighting. Funding for item 11 is anticipated once the task is further refined.

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POTENTIAL FUTURE PROJECTS

Shaded Fuel Break

The creation of a shaded fuel break surrounding the community may slow an oncoming flame front and yield enough time for a more complete evacuation and/or allow emergency services more time to save lives and structures. One possible routing for the break is shown in yellow in the illustration below.



Creating a shaded fuel break will require the cooperation of neighboring municipalities, special districts and private land owners.

A possible approach for making this happen:

- 1) Have our designated Fire Safety Consultant, Ray Moritz, tour the areas which surround our neighborhood and make a recommendations as to whether such a break could, without undue cost or environmental impact, be constructed, in whole or in part.
- 2) Contact the neighboring special districts, municipalities or private land owners in an effort to secure their cooperation.
- 3) Depending on the reaction of the surrounding land owners, design and estimate costs for the creation and maintenance of the break.
- 4) Work with Ray to design a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Once completed, and accepted by local Cal Fire authorities, this document can be used to apply for external funding sources and grants we could use to finance the effort.

This approach assumes District's financial resources and priorities would preclude complete financing of this effort.

Fire Retardants

Looking to the future, other concepts and ideas may prove useful to reducing our wild fire risk.

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- AIG/Phos-chek – AIG, an insurance company, has created a new service whereby homeowners, if they have enough time, can have their properties treated with Phos-chek, an established flame retardant often used by fire fighting teams. The District could potentially establish contracts in advance for such services should the need arise.
- Foam – Also gaining in popularity are systems a homeowner can use to spray flame insulating foam on their homes prior to an evacuation order.

Care will have to be taken to assess any environmental risks the introduction of these compounds may create.

If any of these new technologies is judged to be viable for our situation, we may wish to re-assign our priorities and “fast-track” their adoption.

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APPENDIX A, LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Correspondence with District Legal Council on the District's work in Waste Water removal including storm run off and the District's initiative in fire safety.

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Los Trancos Water District ("District") Board
From: Sandy Sloan, District Counsel
DATE: May 1, 2008
RE: District Powers

You have asked if the District may address wastewater and/or storm water issues under its current powers. I have concluded that it may do so. As you know from previous memos, a County Water District has numerous powers granted by the California Water Code ("Water Code"). However, when the District was formed in the mid-1950's, it adopted an ordinance setting out what its purview was; to expand that purview would require adoption of additional ordinances.

The District was formed before each county had a Local Agency Formation Commission ("LAFCO") and now each county's LAFCO controls not only the formation and dissolution of special districts, but also the powers granted to them. The current ordinances adopted by the District addressing the powers of the District all involve water. Therefore, I have advised you that if you wish to exercise powers other than those related to water (and taking care of the District's own property), and adopt new ordinances, you should seek the approval of LAFCO. However, if you wish to expand the water issues you wish to address, this expansion would be allowed under Ordinance 4 and would not need LAFCO approval.

Ordinance 4, Section 2, states:

"The District will furnish a system, plant, works and undertaking used for and useful in obtaining, conserving and disposing of water for public and private uses, including all parts of the enterprise, all appurtenances to it, and lands, easements, rights in land, water rights, contract rights, franchises, and other water supply, storage and distribution facilities and equipment."

This Section mentions not only “a system” and “plant,” but also “works” and “undertakings”, so the District’s powers are not restricted to physical improvements but can include “undertakings” and programs. Though other terms used in the Ordinance are defined, “water” is not, and so it is instructive to look at the definitions of water set out in the Water Code that apply to a County Water District. The powers of a County Water District set out in the Water Code clearly embrace not only domestic water, but also storm water and sewage water. The powers include:

- “Controlling, distributing, storing, spreading, sinking, treating, purifying, recapturing and salvaging any water including sewage and storm waters, for the beneficial use of the district or its inhabitants or the owners of rights to water therein.” Water Code § 31047, emphasis added.
- “A district may drain and reclaim lands within the district either by surface or underground works or both; and may acquire by appropriation or other lawful means, and divert, store, conserve, transport or dispose of water resulting from such operations; and may acquire, by appropriation or other lawful means, and divert store, conserve, transport or dispose of flood and storm water within the district, and flood and storm water of streams or watercourses outside of the district which flow into the district, for any beneficial purpose or use.” Water Code § 31033, emphasis added.
- “A district may acquire, construct, and operate facilities for the collection, treatment and disposal of sewage, waste and storm water of the district and its inhabitants and may contract with any public agency including but not limited to sanitation districts for sewer outfall facilities. A district also may acquire, construct, and operate facilities for the collection, treatment and disposal of sewage, waste and storm water of inhabitants outside its boundaries; provided that it shall not furnish any such service to the inhabitants of any other public agency without the consent of such other public agency expressed by resolution or ordinance...” Water Code § 31100, emphasis added.

The Water Code gives broad powers to the District to address storm and sewage water, as well as domestic water. Ordinance 4 of the District, enacted before LAFCO was created, gives broad powers to the District with regard to water. Since water is not narrowly defined in this Ordinance, it is logical to conclude that the District may address all issues of water, as water is considered in the Water Code. No approval of LAFCO would be necessary to address storm and sewage water issues.

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Los Trancos Water District ("District") Board
From: Sandy Sloan, District Counsel
DATE: August 7, 2008
RE: District Powers

This memo is written as a follow up to my May 1, 2008 memo regarding District powers. In that memo I concluded that Ordinance 4 of the District, enacted before LAFCO was created, gave broad powers to the District with regard to water. Since water was not narrowly defined in the Ordinance, it was logical to conclude that the District may address all issues of water, as water is considered in the California Water Code. Water in the California Water Code includes domestic water, storm water and sewage water.

You have asked if the District may spend money on fire safety, in particular, assisting residents of the District in reducing fuel loads. If the District Board finds that projects reducing fire risk are "works" and/or an "undertaking" useful in "conserving and disposing of water for public and private uses"¹, then the District can logically spend money for this purpose. You have told me that reducing fire risk protects the water distribution system. Most importantly, you have said that reducing fuel loads reduces the chance of a fire destroying structures and vegetation, which would inevitably lead to major storm water runoff².

If the Board determines that it wishes to spend money on reducing fire risk in order to protect the water distribution system and the storm water runoff patterns, it may do so. Even though the water distribution lines are now owned by CalWater, the District may take actions to protect these lines. And, since a major fire could cause major alterations in storm water runoff patterns causing, in turn, damage to District residents, the District may take actions to protect these patterns. Such expenditures would be legitimate and not a gift of public funds, if the District finds a public purpose is being served.

Please give me a call if you have any questions.

¹ All language in quotes is from the District's Ordinance 4.

² I recommend having an expert in fire risk substantiate these statements.