



Serenity Conference Center Update

Between October 2011 and June 2012, the Arimol - Meadowbrook Cedar Company illegally destroyed a wetlands area and seasonal stream in the neighborhood behind Rim of the World High School while in the process of building several homes for their Serenity Conference Center. Without a permit and without any environmental review, the area's natural stream was buried with fill and diverted into a pipe culvert. These actions not only radically altered the neighborhood's environment, but the water quality as well.

This 1.8 acre development at the corner of Meadowbrook Road and Cedar Court in the Crest Park neighborhood of Lake Arrowhead has now been partially completed, with residents living in several of the homes.

SOFA, the Sierra Club and activist community members have been working with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, a state agency, to restore the environmental damage done in this neighborhood.

A Cleanup and Abatement Order (R6V-2013-0078) was issued on September 9, 2013. It cited "unauthorized discharges of waste and fill materials to creeks, springs and wetlands in the Crest Park Community of Lake Arrowhead." This new order was an update to a previous order in March 2012. Initial surface water restoration activities were to have been completed by November 8, 2013.

On November 7, one day before the work was to have been completed, Bruce Eilerts, Lead Biologist for the Sanberg Group, hired by Arimol / Meadowbrook Cedar, requested an extension for wetland restoration, even disputing the designation of the area as wetlands. On November 22, the Executive

Officer for the Lahontan Regional Water Board, Patty Zwartz Kouyoumdjian, denied the extension request, and advised Mr. Eilerts to provide the water



Erosion from recent rain storm at the Serenity Conference Center

board with reasons for a late submittal of the Plan. She stated, "It is in our mutual interest to complete restoration of the site as soon as possible in a manner that is protective of water quality." However, no new deadline was given for the restoration work to begin. Although the violations could incur a \$498,000 fine, this was reduced to \$60,000, apparently for not meeting the deadline of November 8.

SOFA and the Sierra Club hoped to pursue our concerns with the County that the project improperly circumvented planning review and avoided the disclosure requirements afforded the public by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The County of San Bernardino however, has washed their hands of any culpability in their Land Use decision, leaving the Regional Water Quality Control Board as the only regulatory agency caring about this environmental degradation.

We will continue to work with the local residents, the Sierra Club and our legal advisors to see a restoration plan implemented through the Lahontan Regional Water Board.

Progress Report On Arrowhead Ridge

Before Arrowhead Ridge can become a fully useable nature park, there are seven key restoration and improvement projects that need to be accomplished. These include grading work to fill ditches, re-contour slopes and level disturbed areas, reshaping the entryway with retaining wall borders, constructing a small parking lot, re-establishing natural drainage courses, converting upper roads to trails; planting trees, and covering a tall retaining wall with engraved flagstones, acknowledging donors.

To help finance these essential projects, the San Bernardino Mountains Land Trust is creating a special donor wall. The existing retaining wall at the site is being converted into a commemorative monument to acknowledge everyone who is inspired to support the protection of the last, best and only forest open space in the heart of Lake Arrowhead.



The wall will be constructed of natural flagstone, attractively landscaped with trees and sheltered by a rustic shade covering.

The first 15 flagstones have already been purchased by generous donors and will be put in place as soon as weather permits, so that everyone interested in the project can begin to see how remarkable and distinctive this one-of-a-kind monument will look.

It is estimated some projects will be in the \$10,000 range, while others upwards of \$75,000 or more, depending on potential volunteer and in-kind help

For more information, visit www.sbmlt.net.



New entrance to Arrowhead Ridge Park

Church of the Woods Update: New Conceptual Site Plan

Board members of SOFA and the Mountains Group of the Sierra Club met with Church of the Woods members on April 8, 2013, to review a revised conceptual site plan that may be submitted to the County Land Use Services Department as an alternative to their original plan which was analyzed in the Environmental Impact Report from April, 2010. Only preliminary drawings were available at the meeting and very few details were made available.

As SOFA members recall, the original plan, located on Highway 18 between Bear Springs Road and Daley Canyon Road, included extensive mountain-top removal (over 350,000 cubic yards of soil and all vegetation to be graded for the project), and a parking lot with 540 spaces which would promote excessive water run-off and contamination of Little Bear Creek (which runs into Lake Arrowhead). The plan would cause a radical change in aesthetics along the designated Scenic Byway, the disruption of the County recognized wildlife corridor, the installation of over ten stoplights, the potential destruction of riparian habitat and meadow, and the potential loss of sensitive species such as the Southern rubber boa. The plan violated both the San Bernardino County General Plan and the Lake Arrowhead Community Plan.

Apparently, the new plan removes one ball field, but where the second field was indicated on the original plan there is still a large area to be "leveled" out in the back. The new plan reduces parking from 540 to 400, and indicates some reduct-

tion in building square footage. A very large storm culvert and the front ball field were still present.

If the Church were to submit a revised Conditional Use Permit application based on this plan, they would still have a number of items to complete, including a grading plan which would specify cut and fill amounts, a fuel modification plan, a greenhouse gas analysis, a biotic resource study, a traffic impact study, and a water quality management plan – all of which would have to show significant improvement over the original plan.

As of this date we have received no notice from County Land Use Planning that the Church has submitted this revised conceptual plan which is smaller in scope than the original, yet still has massive land moving (over 300,000 cubic yards), undefined impacts to the headwaters of Lake Arrowhead and the onsite riparian area, and major traffic impacts (safety and intended traffic lights).

This project remains in the County Land Use pipeline with an uncertain future. We will continue to monitor its status.

Community Wildfire Prevention

by Bernhard O. Voelkelt

Residents of the San Bernardino Mountains lost two successful and important long term fire prevention programs in 2013. The first program was the highly acclaimed "Large Parcel Fuel Reduction and Modification Program" operated by County Fire and the NRCS. This program ended with the beginning of this year. The other program was "Forest Care", which created defensible space on private properties making them compliant with state and county codes pertaining to hazardous fuel abatement. The loss of these two important programs leaves a void in the effort to reduce the risk of catastrophic fires and can allow the treated areas to become hazards once again.

The October 24, 2013, edition of the *Mountain News* featured a cover story on the tenth anniversary of the devastating Old Fire that impacted so many of us. Accompanying the story was a poll, asking readers their opinion as to where we stand today with wildfire safety and prevention. The results were surprising to me and leave me cautiously optimistic for the future of our communities.

An astonishing 50% of respondents realize that being dependent on government handouts to reduce our exposure to wildfire is not a viable option. They want our communities to become self-reliant and proactive in mitigating risks.

Another 30% of respondents recognize we live in a dynamic natural environment and vegetation will grow back after having been subjected to fuel reduction and fuel modification work. Thus, ongoing maintenance is necessary and important.

Only 20% of respondents feel comfortable with what has been achieved in wildfire risk mitigation over the past decade and see no need for further action. So 80% of respondents believe in self-reliance and proactively addressing our unique challenges. With the loss of governmental assistance programs, it is important that mountain residents take the initiative in fire hazard abatement.

Are you concerned whether or not your property meets County Fire Hazard Abatement Code, Ordinance 23.0304? Would you like to proactively protect your property and investment and in extension help protect your neighborhood? Would you, your friends, your church, your homeowner association be interested in learning simple steps to reduce the impact of wildfire on our communities? Is your fire insurance company challenging you regarding fire risks on your property?

I can offer my support as a highly qualified community based specialist in wildfire risk mitigation and defensible space assessments.

For more information on community wildfire risk mitigation, please visit my website: www.bor-consulting.weebly.com.

ANNUAL SOFA HOLIDAY PARTY

Saturday, December 14th, 6:00 pm.
At the Mountains Community Senior Center
675 Grandview Road, Twin Peaks

There will be both a silent and live auction
of great gifts for the holidays.
Live Christmas Music by SENARA & Friends

This is a wonderful opportunity to share holiday cheer and do some last minute holiday shopping.

For more information call
Hugh Bialecki at 336-7504