South Placer Fire District

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An Organization Committed to the Well-Being of the South Placer Community

October 23, 2017

Homeowners Association
Attention: _____

Address: _____
_____

Re: Hazardous vegetation in the common open areas – Subdivision Maintenance

Mr. _____,

The Placer County Hazardous Vegetation Ordinance only applies to vacant lots. The HOA and individual home owners will need to cooperate with the HOA and other agencies responsible for preservation of the open areas.

The back yard slopes of several homes exceed 15% in some areas. There is very hazardous vegetation within 50' of homes close to the common areas. Public resources Code 4291 requires a shaded fuel break from 30'-100' of inhibited dwellings and 30-**150' of shaded fuel break with slopes greater than 15%.** The state guidelines for vegetation management are listed below:

• Creation of Defensible Space through vegetation management usually means reducing the amount of fuel around the home, providing separation between fuels, and or reshaping retained fuels by trimming. Creation of Defensible Space can typically be done by removing fuels; removing lower limbs of trees; or reducing the height of the smaller fuels.

• In all cases, fuel reduction does not mean cutting down all trees and shrubs, or creating a bare ring of earth across the property. It does mean arranging the tree, shrubs and other fuels sources in a way that makes it difficult for fire to transfer from one fuel source to another.

The methods used to manage fuel can be important in the safe creation of Defensible space. Care should be taken with the use of equipment when creating your defensible space zone. Internal combustion engines must have spark arresters and metal cutting blades should be used with caution to prevent starting fires during periods of high fire danger. A metal blade striking a rock can create a spark and start a fire. This is a common cause of fires during summertime. Vegetation removal can also cause soil disturbance, soil erosion, re-growth of new vegetation, and introduction of non-native invasive plants. Always keep soil disturbance to a minimum, especially on steep slopes. Erosion control techniques such as minimizing use of heavy equipment, avoiding stream or gully crossings, use of mobile equipment during dry conditions, and covering exposed disturbed soil areas will help reduce soil erosion and plant re-growth.

The following fuel treatment guidelines comply with the requirements of 14 CCR 1299 and PRC 4291.

General Guidelines:

1. Maintain a firebreak by removing and clearing away all flammable vegetation and other combustible growth within 30 feet of each building or structure, with certain exceptions pursuant to PRC §4291(a).

2. Dead and dying woody surface fuels and aerial fuels within Shaded Fuel Break shall be removed. Loose surface litter, normally consisting of fallen leaves or needles, twigs, bark, cones, and small branches, shall be permitted to a depth of 3 inches in height. This guideline is primarily intended to eliminate trees, bushes, shrubs and surface debris that are completely dead or with substantial amounts of dead branches or leaves/needles that would readily burn.

3. Down logs or stumps, when embedded in the soil, may be retained when isolated from other vegetation.

4. Shaded Fuel Break: Separation Between Fuels

When using this guideline to obtain compliance with CCR 1299 and PRC 4291 within the Shaded Fuel Break surrounding each structure, minimum clearance between fuels will range from 4 feet to 40 feet in all directions. Clearance should be in both the horizontal and vertical directions. The clearance distance between vegetation will depend on the slope, vegetation size, vegetation type (brush, grass, trees), and other fuel characteristics (fuel compaction, chemical content etc). Properties with greater fire hazards will require greater clearing between fuels. For example, if your property is on steeper slopes or has larger sized vegetation, this justifies greater spacing between individual trees and bushes (see Plant Spacing Guidelines and Case Examples below). Grass generally should not exceed 4 inches in height. However, grass and other forbs may be maintained less than 18 inches in height above the ground when isolated from other fuels or where necessary to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion.

Clearance requirements include:

• Horizontal clearance between aerial fuels, such as the outside edge of the tree crowns or high brush. Horizontal clearance helps stop the spread of fire from one fuel to the next.

• Vertical clearance between lower limbs of aerial fuels, and the nearest surface fuels and grass/weeds. Vertical clearance removes "ladder fuels" and helps prevent a fire from moving from the smaller fuels to the taller fuels.

Plant Spacing Guidelines

Guidelines are designed to break the continuity of fuels and be used as a "rule of thumb" for achieving compliance with Regulation 14 CCR 1299.

Minimum horizontal Space from edge of one tree canopy to the edge of the next

Trees:

Slope	Spacing
0% to 20 %	= 10 feet
20% to 40%	= 20 feet

Minimum horizontal space between edges of shrub

Shrubs:

Slope	Spacing
0% to 20 %	= 2 times the height of the shrub
20% to 40%	= 4 times the height of the shrub

Case Example of Separation between Fuels: Oak Woodlands

Oak woodlands, the combination of oak trees and other hardwood tree species with a continuous grass ground cover, are found in much of Western Placer County. Wildfire in this setting is very common, with fire behavior dominated by rapid spread through burning grass. Given a setting of moderate slopes (between 20% and 40%), wide spacing between trees, and continuous dense grass, treatment of the grass is the primary fuel reduction concern. Application of the guideline would result in cutting grass to a maximum 4 inches in height and removing the clippings, with consideration of creating 20 feet spacing between trees.

A shaded fuel break is defined as: A defensible location to be used by fire suppression resources to suppress oncoming wildfires. Any fuel break by itself will NOT stop a wildfire. It is a location where the fuel has been modified to increase the probability of success for fire suppression activities. Ground resources can use the location for direct attack or firing out. Air resources can use the location for fire retardant drops. The public and fire resources can use the location for more efficient ingress and egress.

The only oak trees eligible to be removed under the following prescriptions are in the 4-inch diameter class (diameter of main stem at breast height) or smaller. All oak trees larger than the 4- inch diameter class will only be pruned to a height of 8 to 10 feet above the ground, not to reduce the live crown ration of the plant to below 50%.

Oak trees with trunks within 3 feet of each other, essentially making one canopy, may be considered one tree in the defensible landscape areas. Prune branches off of all residual trees from 8 to 10 feet off the forest floor, not to reduce the live crown ratio below 1/2 of the height of the tree. ***Adjacent non-oak trees can be removed to create horizontal distances between residual trees from 20 feet between trunks up to 8 to 15 feet between tree crown drip lines.***

One clump of trees per lot or acre, where tree trunks are within 20 feet of each other, may also be retained in the defensible landscape areas providing spread of fire to or from this feature is adequately mitigated. Mitigation measures for this feature include:

a) Prune branches off of all residual trees from 8 to 10 feet off the forest floor, not to reduce the live crown ratio below 1/2 of the height of the tree.

b) Non oak trees adjacent to this feature may be removed to create horizontal distances ***between residual trees from 20 feet between trunks up to 8 to 15 feet between tree crown drip lines.*** No ground fuels shall exist within the drip-line of the feature.

Please contact our administration office with any questions,

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Michael Ritter, Division Chief