

March- April 2017

Carmel River NEWS

From the Carmel River Watershed Conservancy (CRWC)

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For more news and watershed updates please check out the Conservancy's website!

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Carmel River Watershed Tours

Available for this summer! If

Better Fire Management for the Carmel River Watershed

By Lindsay Cope, Lawson Little Memorial Watershed Associate

Fire is a natural disturbance in the Carmel River Watershed ecosystem. Sound management of the watershed that allows natural burn and offers security for the community at the wildland-urban interface is necessary to reduce the fiscal burden of emergency response. Creation and maintenance of fuelbreaks is prudent and will reduce the spread of wildfires in the future.

Increasing frequency of once-in-a-lifetime fires along the wildland urban interface poses significant risk to local residents. In Monterey County, 85% of lands are considered high risk for wildfires. The blaze of the Soberanes Fire consumed 132,127 acres of land over a three month burn. The fire resisted efforts of fire fighters and cost \$262 million when it was finally done. California's central coast poses a unique challenge to fighting wildfire blazes, the evening fog brings winds that stoke the fire rather than slow the burn (Schmalz, 2016).

Local fire experts argue that future fires can be mitigated if fuelbreaks and firebreaks are created during a non-emergency period and maintained so that in the event of a fire precautionary efforts limit damages. Made in anticipation of fires, a good fuelbreak is a wide naked ridge that allows firefighters to get in and fight fire from both sides. Firebreaks are narrow areas where all ground vegetation has been removed and function to reduce the intensity of wildfires. Non-emergency maintenance helps prevent fires from eclipsing the landscape by eliminating fuel that would otherwise perpetuate the flames. Maintained fuelbreaks and firebreaks along contiguous ridge lines that have been effective in past fires can reduce the impact of future fires, experts say. Proactive development of fuelbreaks can reduce the impact of bulldozer lines created during emergency response to fire, helping to reduce combustible materials in the wild land-urban interface and to maintain wilderness character.

interested contact [Lorin Letendre](#).

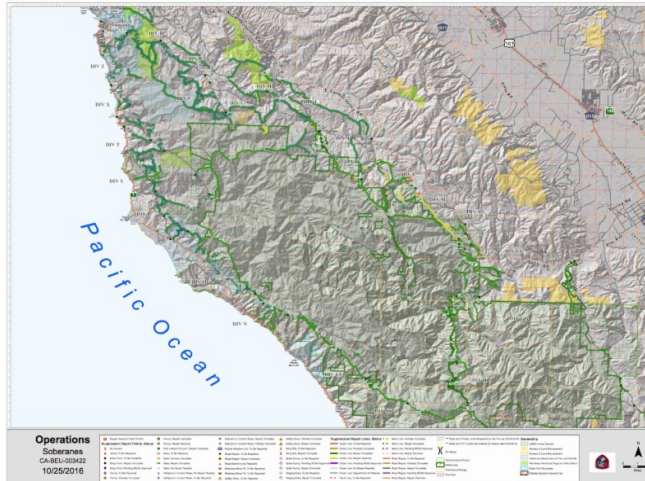
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Map of the Soberanes Fire Breaks

The US Forest Service has outlined a plan to establish fuelbreaks for the protection of at-risk communities, reduce the cost to suppress future fires, and to preserve the natural landscape. The proposal aims to protect communities at risk to fire by maintaining 24 miles of historically used firebreaks, including approximately 10.4 miles in the Ventana wilderness and 13.6 miles of non-wilderness lands. The efforts of the Forest Service are moving in the right direction for precautionary land management, but may not be sufficient.

So what more can be done? Key fire and fuelbreaks must be identified to provide best chance of fighting a wildfire and reduce the risk of fires entering populated areas. Community engagement with government agencies to prioritize creation and maintenance of key fire and fuel breaks is necessary. Federal, state, and local government agencies will be best equipped to manage future fire events by engaging in collaborative action now. As a community it is prudent to advocate for these protective measures.

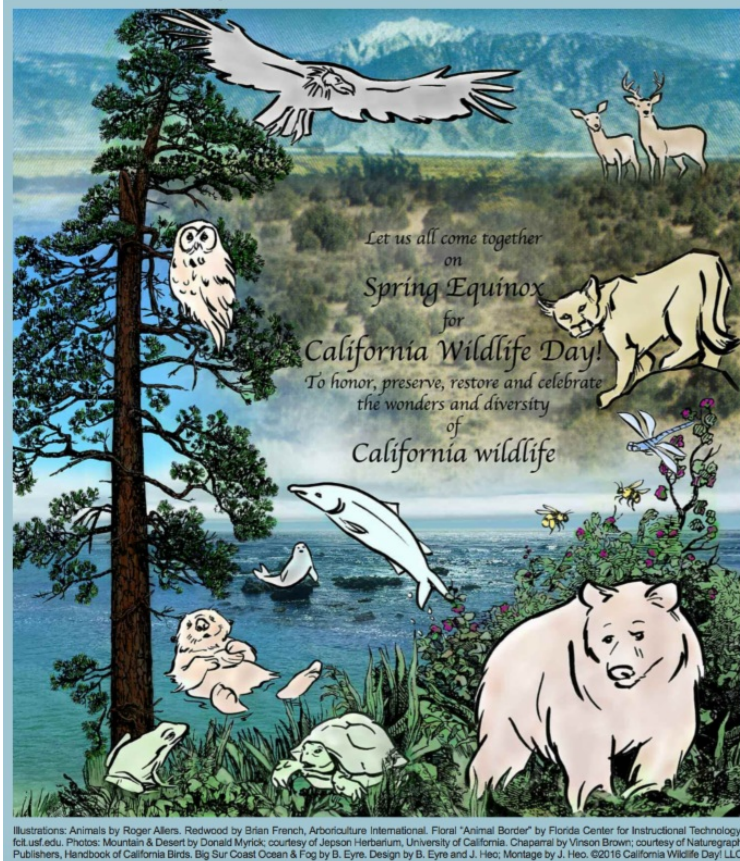
Sources:

Schmalz, David. "How the Soberanes Fire compares to others in recent county history." Monterey County Weekly. July 28 2016.

New: California Wildlife Day!

Ongoing efforts by the Carmel River Watershed Conservancy and allied organizations have yielded a new annual celebration! California Wildlife Day has been declared in the State of California and will occur every year on the Spring Equinox. California Wildlife Day is an opportunity to inspire and teach Californians about the many unique species of flora and fauna in our state to advance the preservation and protection of California's many ecosystems and species through public education. Watersheds will be a special focus of this initiative.

The first major celebrations of this holiday will be held on the Spring Equinox in March 2018.



An extremely wet year for the Carmel River

By Lindsay Cope

Larry Hampson, District Engineer at the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, spoke with me about the impacts of the heavy winter rains on the Carmel River, which he explained has been classified as an extremely wet winter, the highest classification for Carmel River flow. At peak flow in February, the river was carrying 10,000 cubic feet per second.

Flooding of homes along Paso Hondo Road in January and February has been the most significant damage due to heavy rains. Sandbags had been deployed in January to hold back the flood waters and reduced the impact of higher flows in February. The cause of extensive flooding in the this area is due to a combination of factors. Vegetation encroachment into the channel since the last big flows in the late 1990s encouraged debris and sediment to accumulate. This deposition in the channel has reduced the capacity of the channel to carry flows. Reduced carrying capacity and heavy precipitation caused the river to breach into the flood plain near Paso Hondo.



Carmel River Flooding

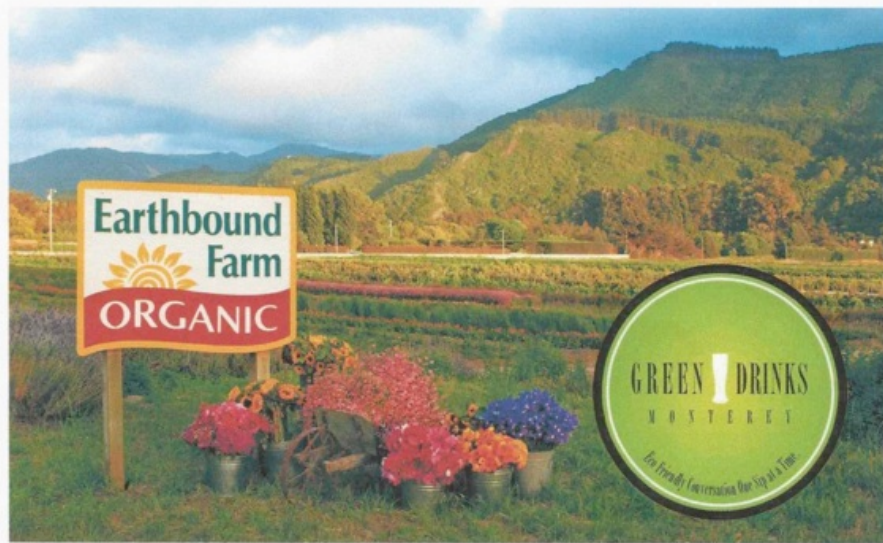
There is no specific data that connect peak flows of the Carmel River with the Soberanes Fire, however, Mr. Hampson indicates that the river flow could be 30% higher than normal due to loss of vegetation from the fire. As a result of this vegetation loss, Mr. Hampson said we could expect higher water flows following the rainy season since more water will be coming out of the tributaries due to fire effects. There is no specific data to determine the hydrological impacts of the Soberanes Fire in the Carmel River Watershed, but increased sediment load can reduce the carrying capacity of rivers. Increased debris washed down from fires during periods of intense rainfall, like we are experiencing this year, can also clog water ways. Flood flows are the most damaging hydrologic response to wildfires, and compound the economic costs of fires. (Neary et. al, 2011) Mr. Hampson informed me that the USGS is working on calibrating a model and anticipate making estimates on the impact of fires on the river. The model is based on precipitation and will simulate flows.

Areas that experienced flooding may recruit native plants, particularly in areas that don't usually get flooded. Regeneration of vegetation along the river banks show the dynamic cycle where the river washes out older vegetation and brings in newer vegetation.

Sources:

Neary, Daniel G., Koestner, Karen A., Youberg, Ann. "Hydrologic Impacts of High Severity Wildfire: Learning from the Past and Preparing for the Future." 2011.

Save the Date: Earth Day



Earthday & Green Drinks Monterey @ Earthbound Farm Stand

Saturday, APRIL 22, 2017, 4:00 - 6:30 pm

7250 Carmel Valley Rd, Carmel, CA 93923
5 min. east of Hwy 1



THE SUSTAINABILITY
ACADEMY
ECO Solutions for Community Good

The Sustainability Academy is partnering with Earthbound Farm's Carmel Valley Farm Stand to host an Earth Day Green Drinks Event. Green Drinks is a networking event providing professionals in the field of sustainability, regardless of affiliation, an opportunity to network, learn from one another and to discover new business opportunities.

A \$10 suggested donation includes delicious organic appetizers, local wine provided by Heller Estate and organic kale lemonade. There will also be a raffle with some fabulous raffle prizes.

Proceeds benefit The Sustainability Academy, a local non-profit whose mission is to accelerate the mainstream practice of sustainability on the Central Coast of California. The event is also supported by a list of local organizations including: Cal-Am Water Co., AIA Monterey Bay Chapter and the Carmel River Watershed Conservancy.



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Carmel River
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This is an event you don't want to miss !