

CONTENTS

- 18. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Community Fire Safety Action Plan 1
 - 18.1. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Description 1
 - 18.1.1. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Wildfire Environment 1
 - 18.2. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Evacuations 3
 - 18.3. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Community Meeting Summary 3
 - 18.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects..... 4
 - 18.4. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Action Plan 4

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18. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Community Fire Safety Action Plan

18.1. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Description

This planning unit includes the neighborhoods of Lost Hills, Brents Junction, and the unincorporated part of Liberty Canyon. Lost Hills and Brents Junction are in the City of Calabasas. The Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills unit extends from the eastern unincorporated side of Liberty Canyon to and including the open space areas east of Los Angeles County Hwy N1 (Las Virgenes Road). The northern boundary is US Hwy 101 (Ventura Freeway). The southern boundary is due north of Mulholland Highway. The planning unit is 5.6 square miles in area.

Assets at risk in the built environment include less than 400 single-family homes, townhouses, condominiums, and apartments. Also in the unit are national park, state conservancy, and other conservation group inholdings, state park properties (Malibu Creek and Liberty Canyon Natural Preserve), water district offices (Las Virgenes Municipal), a sludge composting



and distribution facility and spreading grounds (Rancho Las Virgenes Community Composting), Los Angeles County Sheriff (Malibu/Lost Hills substation), city park (Juan Bautista De Anza–City of Calabasas), community center (Agoura Hills/Calabasas), school district offices (Las Virgenes), middle school (A.E. Wright), County Supervisor district offices (Zev Yaroslavsky), veterinary hospital, grocer, two gas stations, several eateries, and commercial, business, and retail enterprises. A new shopping center is being constructed at the northeast corner of the intersection of Las Virgenes Road and Lost Hills Road.¹ All homes in the Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills unit are in subdivisions. Single-family home prices in the area currently start at \$550,000 and go up to \$800,000. Condominium and townhouse prices range from \$230,000 to \$430,000.²

18.1.1. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Wildfire Environment

Development in the Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills unit is surrounded by open space and high habitat values. All subdivisions are densely designed with multiple units per acre.^{3,4} Brents Junction was the first neighborhood in the unit to be developed in the 1920s as a highway stop.⁵ The commercial area is expanded and modernized. Brents Junction abuts open space and has sparse ornamental vegetation. Liberty Canyon was the first residential area to be

¹ Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation (2010), “New development,” February 2010 Meeting.

² First Team Real Estate, Valley homes now, www.valleyhomesnow.com (accessed March 9, 2010).

³ City of Agoura Hills (2010), *Final General Plan*, 2035 Environmental Impact Report, Volume 1–Part 1.

⁴ City of Calabasas (May 2009), Draft zoning map [Data].

⁵ California State University Northridge (2008), “Brents Junction.” In *Oviatt Library Digital Collection*.

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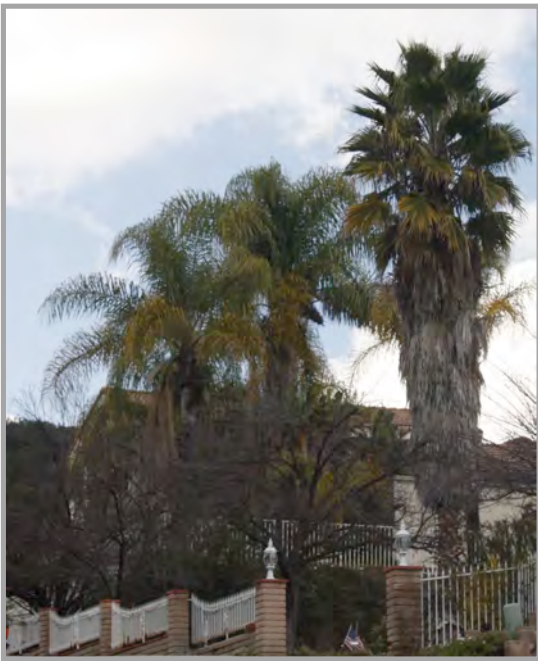
developed in the unit. It is lushly landscaped and has many tall trees. Homes date to the 1970s.⁶ Lost Hills was the most recent area to be subdivided and developed. The environment includes several important ecological attributes: oak woodland, oak savannah, native grasslands, pristine coastal sage scrub, as well as associated sensitive species. The most significant environmental aspect/resource of this planning unit is its designation as the primary habitat and corridor linkage between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Santa Susana Mountains (*aka* Simi Hills). Ventura Freeway undercrossings are key likely-use areas for populations of bobcat, coyote, mountain lion, gray fox, and badger. Threats to the environment include development, vegetation clearance, grading activities, and populations of invasive species.

Passive recreational opportunities include walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling, mountain biking, bird watching, and wildflower and wildlife viewing. Developed and private types include swimming, court sports, and exercise classes.

Ingress and egress is from US Highway 101 (Ventura Freeway) to the north, and Los Angeles County Highway N1 (Malibu Canyon Road) to the east, and Agoura Road to the west. Lateral arteries include Liberty Canyon and Lost Hills roads. Streets are well-maintained with modern improvements such as shoulders, parking, curbs, and lights.

CAL FIRE designated the entire Santa Monica Mountains region as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, including this area. This determination by the state is based on factors such as fire weather, slope, and fuel loading, among others.

The Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills Planning Unit has a history of many wildfires: Agoura #2 (January 10, 1933); unnamed (August 18, 1955); 18,000-acre Liberty (November 28, 1958) with more than 100 homes destroyed in the burn area; 28,201-acre Wright (September 25, 1970) with 403 homes destroyed in the burn area and ten fatalities;



Liberty Canyon (July 21, 1979); Las Virgenes (November 24, 1980); Gun (May 30, 1984); Mulholland (July 12, 1985); Freeway (September 23, 1994); Calabasas (October 21, 1996) caused by arcing power lines at the intersection of Las Virgenes Road and US 101; Lost Hills (August 6, 1997); Agoura (March 28, 2003); Abrams (August 8, 2003); Las Virgenes (November 3, 2007); and Lost (July 26, 2008).^{7,8}

Structures in the Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills unit are predominantly built of stucco, plaster, or masonry. Age class ranges from the 1970s to present. Most homes, regardless of age, have wooden decks and/or fences. Mature, lush, and tall ornamental vegetation—including unmaintained palm trees—is found around structures in Liberty Canyon. A couple of subdivisions in the unit (single-family homes) are gated. Utilities in Liberty Canyon are aboveground. Most homes are not retrofitted to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.⁹

⁶ E.A. Cheadle (April 25, 2005), “Notice of preparation comments for proposed Liberty Canyon 23-unit residential subdivision (Tentative Tract Map No. 52909),” correspondence from Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to C. Tran, Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, Impact Analysis Section.

⁷ Robert S. Taylor, Biogeographer/Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 12, 2010.

⁸ Mike Davis (1998), “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn.” In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt), pp. 93–147.

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Municipal water supply for the Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills Planning Unit is from Las Virgenes Municipal Water District.¹⁰ Mandatory water conservation and enforcement measures were established in 2009. The district has one emergency 9,500-acre-foot back-up reservoir.¹¹

Los Angeles County Fire Station #125 is located on Las Virgenes Road.

Liberty Canyon is a module of the Agoura Hills Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Members recently received radios and training. They are expanding the group and beginning a community education and outreach program.¹²

18.2. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Evacuations

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines in Liberty Canyon and along Las Virgenes Road, fallen trees, traffic, and locked gates. Liberty Canyon is one-way in and out. Several venues in the Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills unit host large groups of people: Brents Junction businesses, the Agoura Hills/Calabasas Community Center, and Juan Bautista De Anza Park. The area is densely populated and heavily used. Most homes have small domestic animals. The community center or De Anza Park might serve as evacuation sites. Local law enforcement and fire departments should investigate feasibility of use for these areas prior to any designation.

18.3. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Community Meeting Summary

The Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills community meeting was held at the offices of Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky on January 13, 2010. Fifteen residents and three non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at the community meeting. These can be located on Map II.18-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.18-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- Arthur E. Wright Middle School
- Agoura Hills / Calabasas Community Center
- Church in the Canyon
- Juan Bautista De Anza Park (City of Calabasas)
- Los Angeles County Malibu/Lost Hills Sheriff's Substation
- Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Calabasas Field Office
- Las Virgenes Municipal Water District compost facility
- Las Virgenes Municipal Water District offices



⁹ State of California, Building Standards Commission, www.bsc.ca.gov (accessed February 8, 2010).

¹⁰ Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (2010), District Map [Data], www.lvmwd.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=838.

¹¹ Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (2010), www.lvmwd.com.

¹² Pamela Rowe, Liberty Canyon Module, Agoura Hills CERT, personal communication, January 13, 2010.

18.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects

The following items are community-identified projects from the community meeting. Residents were encouraged to “think big,” and not be concerned about project cost or property ownership for the project brainstorming process. Following the brainstorming, residents prioritized projects based on which were most realistic and most important. These projects can be located on Map II.18-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.18-2. LIBERTY CANYON–LOST HILLS COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK
Fuel-reduction buffer that meets regulations and Best Management Practices between open space and community	Fuel Reduction	1
Hazardous tree removal/thinning program	Fuel Reduction	2
County policy to eliminate hazard trees and prevent new ones from being planted	Fuel Reduction / Policy	2
Community home-hardening program	Hardening Homes	2
Fire prevention planning with Agoura Hills and Calabasas local governments	Policy	3
Community evacuation plan and program for elderly and pets	Evacuation	
“Reverse 911” (mass notification) system to include cell phones	Policy	
Community fire and defensible-space education program	Education	
Phone tree and local CERT program	Emergency Preparedness	
Biomass program for hazard fuels	Fuel Reduction	
Hazardous tree removal project north of Providence Road	Fuel Reduction	
Program to eliminate wood shake roofs	Policy	

18.4. Liberty Canyon – Lost Hills Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Liberty Canyon–Lost Hills Planning Unit.

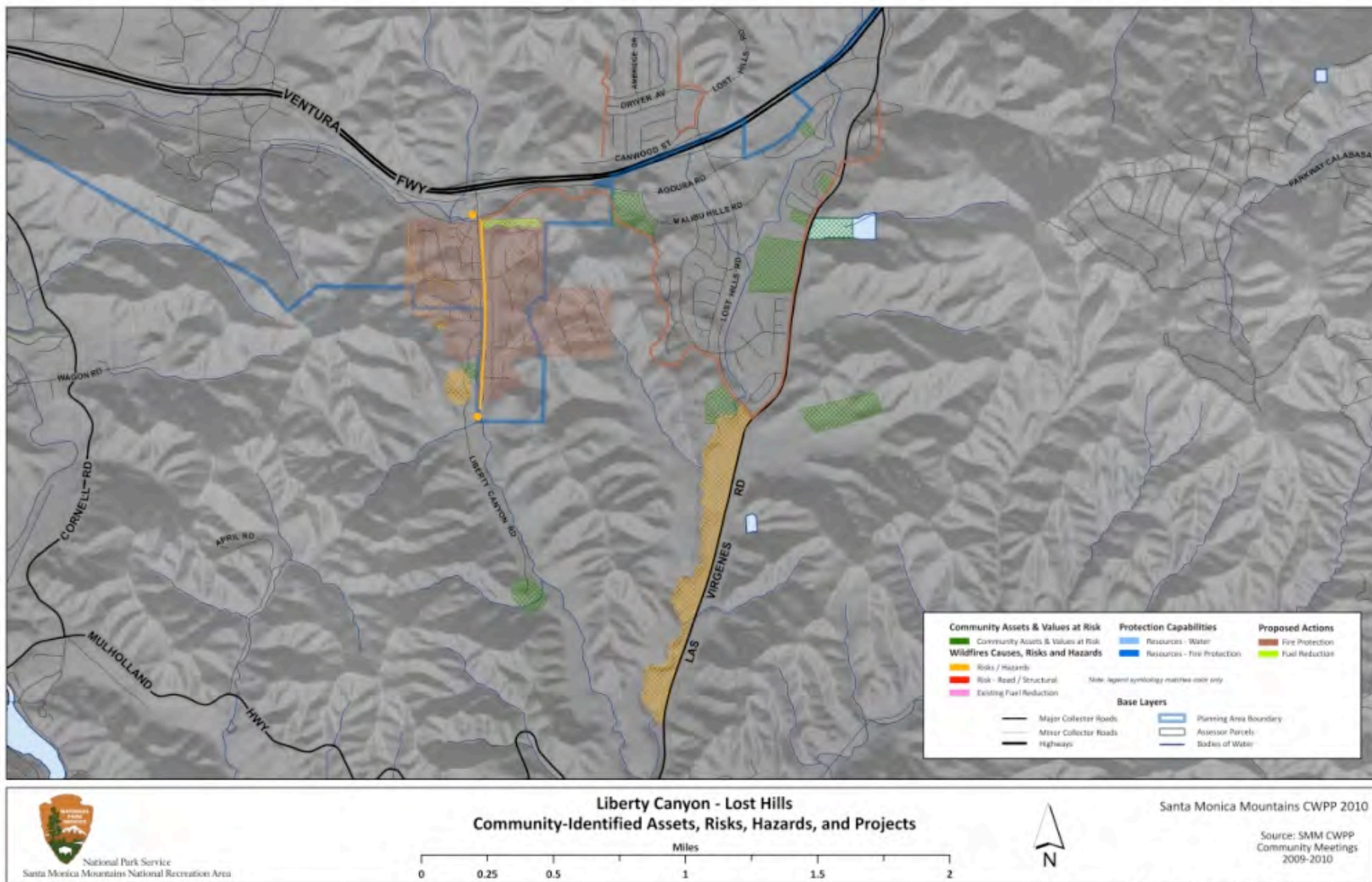
- Form a local FSC or join with nearby FSCs. This organizational structure will facilitate community preparedness for wildfire. Work with the California Fire Safe Council to create a FSC that will best accommodate and enable this area.
- Work through a new Fire Safe Council (FSC), existing homeowner’s association (HOA), or other community organization to begin a local community education and preparedness campaign. Include topics about pool pumps, generators, and home fire-preparedness equipment. This can be done in cooperation with other area FSCs and/or the City of Calabasas, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and the National Park Service.
- FSCs, HOAs, or other neighborhood-level associations collaborate with law enforcement and Los Angeles County Fire to develop local evacuation plans, especially for Liberty Canyon. Efforts should be made to ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions.
- Residents reduce urban fuels in the home ignition zone based on the Conservation Principles and Best Management Practices outlined in Chapters 1, 4, and 5 of this CWPP. Fuels maintenance should be a routine and ongoing practice for all homes and landscapes in the Santa Monica Mountains. This includes ensuring that structures are resistant to heat and embers, maintaining all vegetation “from the house out,” and removing anything in this zone that might ignite and spread fire.

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- Implement a hazard tree removal/thinning program through a FSC or homeowner's association (or other community organization):
 - Near homes, especially trees that threaten more than one home, starting in the areas around Provident Road, Defender Drive, and Country Glen Road,
 - For trees in or near power lines, especially on Liberty Canyon Road,
 - In the buffer between open space and residential areas.
- Ensure that at least one team from each HOA or neighborhood undergoes local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. This is the avenue to begin organizing locally for evacuation planning, in cooperation with local law enforcement and the fire department.
- Develop a neighborhood Arson Watch program. This could be integrated into the work of the Fire Safe Council. Work with the agency partners to help with Arson Watch in the area parks and open spaces during Red Flag weather.
- Explore community purchase and installation of wildland-urban interface (WUI) building products to upgrade homes to current WUI building standards. All residents upgrade homes to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.

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MAP II.18-1. LIBERTY CANYON-LOST HILLS: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS¹³



¹³ This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.