

PUBLIC DRAFT
CONTENTS

- 6. West Malibu Community Fire Safety Plan 1
 - 6.1. West Malibu Community Description 1
 - 6.1.1. West Malibu Current Wildfire Environment..... 1
 - 6.2. West Malibu Evacuations 3
 - 6.3. West Malibu Community Meeting Summary 4
 - 6.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects 4
 - 6.4. West Malibu Action Plan 5

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6. West Malibu Community Fire Safety Action Plan¹

This planning unit includes the neighborhoods of Bonsall Canyon, Zuma Canyon, Horizon Hills, Malibu Park, Malibu West, and Trancas Canyon.

6.1. West Malibu Community Description

The West Malibu Planning Unit is situated in the City of Malibu north of Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) between Kanan Dume Road to the east and Trancas Canyon to the west. PCH is south and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area open space is north. The West Malibu unit is 3.7 square miles in area.

Assets at risk in the built environment include nearly 700 single-family homes, condominiums, apartments, a city equestrian park, riding club, public school complex and sports compound, four private sports/recreation facilities, stage theater company, business complex, two commercial centers, one church with a childcare facility, wastewater treatment plant, and numerous agricultural operations including greenhouses, orchards, row crops, poultry, small farm animals, and equine facilities. Properties and homes vary in size. Villa Malibu Apartments on Cavalleri Road and Malibu West



Condominiums are zoned six units per acre. Malibu Gardens condominiums on lower Cavalleri Road are zoned six units per acre. Single-family homes at Malibu West and along the PCH bluffs of Malibu Park have 2-acre parcels. The remaining home properties in the Cavalleri, Bonsall Canyon, Zuma Canyon, Malibu Park, Horizon Hills, and Trancas Canyon areas are generally 1 to 5 acres.^{2,3} Current real estate values range from \$345,000 for condominiums to \$15 million for larger estates.⁴

6.1.1. West Malibu Current Wildfire Environment

Most of the *intermittent* and *blue-line* riparian areas in the West Malibu unit are considered Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs). All National Park land is an ESHA.^{5,6} Old-growth sycamore woodlands thrive in

¹ This document was written by Julie Clark De Blasio, Principal of Sweetgrass Environmental Consulting, in conjunction with ForEverGreen Forestry.

² California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *Land Use Map 1: Nicholas Canyon to Trancas Beach*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file]. www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

³ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *Land Use Map 2: Zuma Beach to Escondido Beach*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file]. www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

⁴ National Association of Realtors, “Real estate and homes – Malibu.” http://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Malibu_CA, accessed February 2010.

⁵ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *ESHA and Marine Resources Map 1: Nicholas Canyon to Trancas Beach*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file]. www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

⁶ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *ESHA and Marine Resources Map 2: Zuma Beach to Escondido Beach*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file]. www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

PUBLIC DRAFT

some of these areas.⁷ The federally and state-protected peregrine falcon nests in the northernmost areas of this planning unit.⁸

The community offers many opportunities for recreation. Developed types include swimming, tennis, and *dressage*. Passive recreation includes walking, running, hiking, bicycling, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, and bird watching. These latter activities are popular in neighborhoods and along park trails in the area.^{9,10}

Ingress and egress is from Kanan Dume Road, PCH, or Trancas Canyon Road. Many but not all roads are interconnected. Many other roads and private drives are cul-de-sacs. Several newer homes are gated.

The Santa Monica Mountains area is zoned Very High Fire Hazard Severity. This determination by CAL FIRE is based on factors such as fire weather, slope, and fuel loading, among others. The entire West Malibu Planning Unit is within this zone.



Homes in the West Malibu area have a wide *age-class*. Some date to the 1940s. Others, such as the suburban tract type of Malibu West, were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the large estates were built in the last ten to fifteen years (post-1995). Older structures are often wooden type. Newer construction tends to be plaster, stucco, or cement. Wooden decks and fences are common in this area.

Mature, lush, ornamental vegetation is common in this area. Many trees were planted as privacy screens. It is estimated that 90% of the *viewscape* in West Malibu is currently blocked due to the presence of dense, mature, tall trees.¹¹ Many of the larger newer homes appear to not utilize dense, flammable landscaping. At closer inspection, plant materials are often immature and not appropriate for use in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Most structures in the West Malibu Planning Unit are not retrofitted to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.¹²

West Malibu experienced the following wildfires in the last century: the 30,000-acre Malibu-Latigo complex (October 23, 1935); Woodland Hills #65 (October 6, 1943) with 150 homes lost between Corral Canyon and Point Dume; the 16,000-acre Newton/Sherwood/Zuma complex (December 28, 1950) with more than 100 homes lost between Zuma Canyon and Bailard/Lunita; Latigo (October 30, 1967), the 28,201-acre Wright (October 23, 1978) with 403 homes lost and ten fatalities over the burn area; Brush (May 31, 1982); 43,090-acre Dayton Canyon (October 9, 1982) with 74 homes lost over the burn area; 6,567-acre Decker (October 14, 1985); Charmlee (November 24, 1991); Green Meadow (October 26, 1993) with 24 homes lost in the burn area; and Encinal (August 22, 1998).

⁷ Chuck Chriss (2010), *Malibu Complete: Getting Around Malibu – Malibu West Neighborhood*. <http://www.malibucomplete.com>, accessed February 17, 2010.

⁸ Chriss (2010), *Malibu Complete*, accessed February 17, 2010.

⁹ Chriss (2010), *Malibu Complete*, accessed February 17, 2010.

¹⁰ Chriss (2010), *Malibu Complete*, accessed February 17, 2010.

¹¹ Chriss (2010), *Malibu Complete*, accessed February 17, 2010.

¹² State of California, Building Standards Commission (2010), www.bsc.ca.gov, accessed February 17, 2010.

PUBLIC DRAFT

Two Fire Safe Councils (FSCs) are active in the West Malibu Planning Unit. Horizon Hills FSC was established in 2005. Its area of influence includes the 50 homes within the 66-acre neighborhood located upslope from Malibu Park. Community members organized to address the wildfire threat and fuels management. A local CWPP was drafted for this community. They received two grants and completed two vegetation management projects to date.¹³ The second FSC, Malibu West Fire Safe and Sustainability Council, represents 237 homeowners and tenants. It organized to address structural protection and the wildfire threat in their neighborhood.¹⁴ Malibu West FSC is currently working one vegetation management project. They also administered the National Fire Plan grant that funded this CWPP through the California Fire Safe Council Grants Clearinghouse.



Municipal water supply is through Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29 in Malibu. Conveyance is along a transmission main that follows PCH. Water is stored in tanks located on the upland side of the highway. The county adopted mandatory water conservation measures in 2009. Threats to the water supply include infrastructural age and lack of capital funds for upgrade, increased demand from new development, and emergency use.^{15,16}

Los Angeles County Fire Stations #71 at Point Dume and #99 on Encinal Bluffs are located due east and west of the planning unit, respectively.

6.2. West Malibu Evacuations

Evacuation from the West Malibu area will travel either eastward or westward along PCH, depending on law enforcement recommendations based on fire behavior, wind pattern, traffic, and ingress of emergency vehicles. In some cases, and only by the advice of the sheriff, Kanan Dume Road might become an optional route.

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines and trees as well as traffic. There are several cul-de-sacs and gated homes in this unit. Cavalleri Road at Kanan Dume Road has locked gates. Some parcels have mature, highly flammable, and unmaintained urban fuels. Utilities at Malibu West are underground. The other neighborhoods in the West Malibu unit have aboveground power lines, many of which are encroached upon by vegetation. This planning unit has many large educational, recreational, business, commercial, and agricultural facilities, which often host large numbers of people and animals; thus planning is required for emergency situations.

Potential evacuation areas that should be investigated by law enforcement and the fire department include: open disced fields on Morning View and Guernsey Drives and at the intersection of Trancas and PCH; the parking lot at Trancas Country Mart; Zuma Beach; the double-wide tennis courts at the southeast corner of Cavalleri Drive; and the school complex on Morning View Drive.

¹³ Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (December 3, 2008), *Horizon Hills, Malibu, California: Community Wildfire Protection Plan*.

¹⁴ SMMNRA (December 3, 2008), *Horizon Hills, Malibu, California: Community Wildfire Protection Plan*.

¹⁵ Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy/Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (September 2, 2009), *Malibu Parks Public Access Enhancement Plan – Public Works Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report – Water Supply*.

¹⁶ Arthur Schimke, Regional Water Service Superintendent, Waterworks and Sewer Maintenance Division, County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Works (April-June 2010), personal communication.

6.3. West Malibu Community Meeting Summary

The West Malibu meeting was held in the City of Malibu Council Chambers on October 25, 2009. Eleven residents and three non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at this community meeting. These can be seen on Map II.6-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.6-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- Bonsall Canyon Trailhead
- Busch shopping center
- Commercial vineyards and wineries (two of them)
- Juan Cabrillo Elementary School
- Malibu Park Junior High
- Malibu High School
- Equestrian Center
- Malibu United Methodist Church and Childcare Center
- Gas station
- Los Angeles County Fire Department Station #71
- Malibu Stage Company
- Malibu West Community Club
- Malibu West Public Works Treatment Center
- Trancas Park
- Trancas Country Market Center
- Zuma Canyon Trailhead

6.3.1. 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 seen on Map II.6-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.6-2. WEST MALIBU COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED POTENTIAL PROJECTS

| IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION | PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY | PRIORITY RANK |
|---|------------------------------|---------------|
| Dedicated Los Angeles County Fire Department unit for clearance inspection instead of local fire station | Policy | 1 |
| Establish City of Malibu ordinance to prevent future planting of non-native plants, and allow removal of flammable non-native trees | Policy | 2 |
| Annual “brush clearing” – Horizon Hills | Fuel Reduction | 3 |
| Clear trees in power lines | Fuel Reduction | 3 |
| Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy transparency highly regulated | Policy | 3 |
| Create Malibu Park Fire Safe Council | Fire Safe Council | 4 |
| Remove eucalyptus trees – Trancas | Fuel Reduction | 4 |
| Emergency radio transmission program | Evacuation / Fire Protection | |
| Cavalleri gates open during fire | Evacuation | |
| Connective evacuation route from Ramirez Park to Kanan | Evacuation / Fire Protection | |
| Escape routes clearance program | Evacuation / Fuel Reduction | |
| Landscaping collective – to help lower costs | Fuel Reduction | |
| Prune trees – Guernsey Avenue (problematic in high winds) | Fuel Reduction | |
| Water storage | Water Resources | |
| Mark pools, water sources for firefighters | Water Resources | |

6.4. West Malibu Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the West Malibu Planning Unit.

- Work with law enforcement and Los Angeles County Fire Department through a FSC, homeowners association (HOA), or other neighborhood-level association to develop a local evacuation plan. Efforts should be made to ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions.
- Ensure that at least one team from each homeowner’s association or neighborhood undergo Malibu Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. This is the vehicle to begin organizing locally for evacuation planning in cooperation with local law enforcement and the fire department.
- Horizon Hills Fire Safe Council (FSC) established a successful model hazardous tree removal/thinning program. Malibu West FSC has begun a similar project. Hazardous tree removal/thinning should continue to be a priority in these and the other neighborhoods in this planning unit, with priority removal per the list below:
 - Along main evacuation routes,
 - Along the spur roads to main evacuation roads,
 - Near homes, especially trees that threaten more than one home,
 - Trees in or near power lines.
- The Malibu West Fire Safe and Sustainability Council has begun exploring community purchase and installation of Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) building products to upgrade homes to current WUI building standards. This is an important project to help residents harden their homes (make them more fire-resistant). Other HOAs in the area should explore similar programs or cooperate with MWFSSC.
- Residents reduce and maintain urban fuels in the home ignition zone. Local FSCs can lead these efforts in Horizon Hills and Malibu West and help neighboring HOAs or FSCs with similar projects. This work should be 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 throughout the year for all homes and landscapes in the Santa Monica Mountains. This includes: ensuring 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.
- All residents upgrade homes to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.
- Work through FSCs and HOAs to educate residents on the need to keep ingress and egress/evacuation routes clear. Residents need to understand the dangers involved in imprudent parking or long-term street storage of unused vehicles. Because natural disasters can strike at any time, key evacuation ingress/egress routes must be kept free of parked vehicles, especially trailers and other large objects that are difficult to move quickly. Trash cans and other items should be kept off the roadway and out of key turnout/passing areas.¹⁷ A neighborhood-organizing project would include creating off-street parking where it is limited. Neighbors can work together to help each other stay in compliance.
- This area is fortunate to have two functioning local Fire Safe Councils: the Malibu West Fire Safe and Sustainability Council and the Horizon Hills FSC. Efforts should be made to support other neighborhoods here in forming FSCs, joining with the existing Councils, or becoming part of a Malibu FSC.



¹⁷ The law in Los Angeles County states that trash cans can only be on the street after 5 pm of the day preceding, and until 8 pm on the day of waste collection.

MAP II.6-1. WEST MALIBU: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS¹⁸



¹⁸ This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.