



FIRE PREVENTION AREAS, DEFENSIBLE SPACE, AND HOME HARDENING IN NELLIE GAIL RANCH

By Brian Mitchell

Many Nellie Gail Ranch homeowners may not be aware that 542 of our 1,407 homeowner properties have annexation exhibits that outline defined 30-foot "Fire Prevention Areas" that link to neighboring properties. While we have an extensive trail system of easements, these Fire Prevention Areas are separate from the easements and solely on each homeowner's property and not part of our common area. Our CC&Rs also set forth responsibilities and authorities of a discretionary Fire Prevention Committee. The Board formed a Fire Prevention Committee in April 2025 and has subsequently appointed three members to serve as inaugural members of this new Committee. Since our CC&Rs were recorded nearly fifty years ago, the Committee's first order of business was to evaluate these recorded "Fire Prevention Areas" to determine where they are and what the standard of maintenance is for homeowners to implement.

In August we scheduled in-person home assessments with OCFA to evaluate four homes with recorded Fire Prevention Areas. Three OCFA Fire Prevention Specialists met with Nellie Gail Ranch staff, the Fire Prevention Committee, and homeowners to review the CC&R exhibits, and they advised us the CC&Rs with "Fire Prevention Area" delineations are not standards that OCFA uses in evaluating defensible space compliance. The applicable code for property maintenance is Government Code Section 51182, which, in part, references maintaining defensible space of 100

feet from each side and from the front and rear of the structure. The remainder of the in-person inspections focused on OCFA recommendations for "Home Hardening" and defensible space compliance. The devastating Palisades Fire helped raise awareness of these strategies, which are based on extensive research on how homes ignite. Most homes burn not from direct contact with a flame front, but from airborne embers.

The very first thing the inspectors did was determine from which direction the Santa Ana winds blow toward the home. The inspectors then reviewed areas that were most at risk for ember access to deteriorated wood surfaces or interior spaces like attics or uncaulked window and door frames. Each survey took approximately one hour and provided each homeowner with some excellent suggestions. A number of past Pony Express issues and emails to the community have identified steps that OCFA recommends for home hardening. The following link will take you to the OCFA Ready, Set, Go! website and links to an online Home Assessment tool. There is also a link to schedule your own in-person home assessment: <https://ocfa.org/rsg/home-assessment/>

Elsewhere in this issue are additional resources and recommendations for steps you can take to protect your home from wildfires. The bottom line is this, protecting your home is not as daunting as



it might at first seem. It doesn't take a lot of work to take the first step to protect your home from fire. The first step after you determine which direction the Santa Ana Winds flow toward your home might be as simple as asking your gardener to trim a little more or remove some dry brush by your home. Or remove flammable debris stacked up next to your home. Then really look at that first 100 feet of defensible space required to be maintained. Then consider skinning your palm trees if the old palm fronds haven't been removed. Then walk your entire property focusing on the areas you may not have visited in a while paying attention to things you can do to neaten the aesthetic and reduce risk of fire. Week by week, month by month incremental progress can be made and risk of fire reduced. Consider taking your first step...

We appreciate the OCFA and their willingness to assist our homeowners in person! They truly are a support to the Nellie Gail Ranch community.



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