

EUCALYPTUS TREES AND FIRE DANGER ***FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS***

This is a year of extreme fire danger. Before July Santa Cruz County has had three major fires, and northern California has currently over 800 uncontrolled wildfires, many of which were caused by lightning strikes. In the City of Capitola the main fire concern relates to various eucalyptus tree groves, in particular those that border Park Ave. These FAQ's are prepared to address the concerns and question expressed by the public regarding fire danger from eucalyptus trees in the City of Capitola.

- 1. Is there a substantial bureaucratic process to remove a tree?** Yes. Unfortunately there is. Three basic reasons exist that would restrict the removal of trees for any reason other than tree health or public safety. First is the City of Capitola Tree and Forest Management Ordinance. Second is for reasons of sensitive environmental habitat. And finally the tree or trees are on private property, are healthy and pose no danger to the public.
- 2. What is the City of Capitola Tree and Forest Management Ordinance?** The City Council determined that protection and enhancement of existing tree cover throughout the City serves the public interest. This ordinance meets this public policy goal by defining heritage trees, protecting their removal and prescribing maximum maintenance activities such as tree pruning. A heritage tree is any tree that is over 44 inches in circumference (14 inches in diameter) or is otherwise special or unique. Maintenance of heritage trees is limited to the removal of no more than 25% of tree canopy over a three year period. The City of Capitola is responsible for administering this ordinance and any questions about the ordinance should be addressed to the City's Community Development Department 475-7300.
- 3. Does the Tree and Forest Management Ordinance allow trees to be removed simply because they are non native?** No. The trees must be unhealthy or pose a risk to public safety before they can be removed.
- 4. Is it possible to remove all eucalyptus trees because they are a fire danger?** No. Eucalyptus can be maintained so they are not a fire danger. It is up to the property owner to provide such maintenance.
- 5. Who owns the property with all the eucalyptus trees along Park Ave?** The City of Capitola owns a very small piece at the intersection of Kennedy and Park Avenues. The City has a program for on going maintenance on this property. The rest is either owned by State Parks or Union Pacific.
- 6. How does a sensitive environmental habitat affect the ability to remove trees?** The federal government, the State of California, and the City of Capitola all can play a role in defining a sensitive environmental habitat. One common such habitat within

the City of Capitola is for the monarch butterfly. When a butterfly habitat is identified, trees become a very important to the health of the butterfly habitat and the promotion of a robust butterfly population. No trees can be removed from the habitat without a review and analysis by a biologist to determine the affect such a removal would have on the habitat. Other recognized habitats have similar restrictions.

7. **Within the City Limits of the City of Capitola, who is responsible for determining whether there is a fire danger due to trees and who enforces the required fire safe maintenance of trees on private property?** The Central Fire District has that responsibility. If you have a concern that a particular property is a fire danger or contains within it a fire hazard, call the Central Fire District and express your concerns.
8. **Can the City of Capitola do anything to mitigate against fire dangers from trees?** The City can properly maintain its own forested property to standards that are set by the Fire District. The City can help residents to establish maintenance districts, such as a lighting and landscaping districts, but the costs of establishing the districts can be substantial.
9. **What is required to establish a special district to maintain trees as fire safe?** It can take engineering reports and studies to determine the annual costs of the district, the district boundaries, and the formula to spread costs to the properties within the district. A vote of the property owners within the district must be held to establish the district, and each dollar of assessment generates one vote. This one dollar one vote, in the case of the Park Avenue trees, will likely put the determination of the district entirely in the hands of the Union Pacific Railroad, which owns most of the land with eucalyptus trees.
10. **What are the up-front costs for establishing a special district for maintaining trees?** It all depends. If there are sensitive habitats, if the district boundaries are long or the funding formula complicated, the costs could easily run in excess of \$100,000. On the other hand, if the district is simple and supported by the constituents within the districts costs could be less than \$20,000.
11. **How can we be sure that the eucalyptus grove in our area is fire safe?** You can go to Fire Safe.org to get the latest standard for fire safe measures. These measures assure that the urban/rural forest are maintained in a healthy and fire safe matter.
12. **When was the last time these areas were inspected by the fire district?** Annually in the spring, the fire district sends out flyers to the wildland interface areas and notices for clearing of weeds dead and down combustible fuels. Habitat and riparian areas are not noticed due to the local, state and federal mandates. Personal properties that are internally fenced and or not accessible are also not inspected.
13. **What can we do to reduce fire danger in our neighborhood?** Clear away and haul out dead and down fuels such as grasses, dead brush and combustible debris. Limb

up trees to 6 feet above the ground and clear brush from around the perimeter of your home and buildings. To get more detailed information you can go to www.centralfpd.com for links and more specific information.

- 14. What can we do to be prepared for fire?** To be prepared, have an evacuation plan, collection point, working smoke detectors and a fire extinguisher. If you have questions or specific issues you can contact Central Fire Prevention Division at 831-479-6843.