

The Newsletter of the



President's Message: Laura Rodriguez

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Dear FMA Members,

The sun is shining as I write this piece. Last weekend our mountain received much-needed rain. As pleasurable as this sunshine is, I hope for more of the wet stuff.

I am having the pleasure of working with a full board of Trustees and Officers. This is the first time that this has happened in my nearly four years as your President. That being said, we will have two openings up for election in July. The offices of President and Secretary will be available. I encourage folks to consider serving. As I have mentioned before, I was asked to run for President—no warm-up in any other position. I have found that my ability to plan and organize along with keeping meetings on task has been very helpful. The President's role should not be considered daunting. I know many of you out there share these skills and would transition quite nicely into this role.

The biggest decision and discussion topic faced by the FMA and all those that live on the mountain concerns a substance that no two- or four-legged creatures can live long without. That is water, agua, H₂O. A spring membership meeting may be needed to disseminate information and help with the decision-making process. Please review Donita Proctor's report on this topic. [See page 2.] Donita has given many years of service in various roles to FMA. She is graciously continuing as our Ombudsman on water issues to Supervisor Mike McGuire, as well as being our Webmaster. (And she has established a Fitch Mountain blog!)

When temperatures are chilly, summer issues seem far away, but your board is already planning to reach out to law enforcement again to assist in a safe and sane summer on the mountain. I encourage you all to utilize our website to keep abreast of issues and activities. And start thinking, not what your mountain can do for you but what YOU can do for your mountain!

Sincerely, Laura

Water Ombudsman Report by Donita Proctor

The Fitch Mountain Water Service (CSA 41) is one of four County Service Area districts currently operated by the Sonoma County Department of Transportation and Public Works, which has a primary charge of maintaining public roads.

Last May a public meeting with Public Works gave Fitch Mountain residents an opportunity to discuss water costs and to choose from three options for raising rates. Rising operating expenses and dwindling reserves were the driving force for the 15% increase in our water charges in 2011. Incremental increases over the next three years will result in an overall 34% increase.

A comparison of the fees and water consumption of Fitch Mountain residents and our city counterparts was also presented at the public workshop. CSA 41 buys our water from the City of Healdsburg, but the city is not involved in administration or operations. We were told that we could explore having the city “take over” our system, but Healdsburg soon made it clear that it is not interested in this option.

A second option is to form an independent district with local residents serving on a board of directors to oversee the operations of the district and develop budgets and contracts for maintenance, operations, and administration. The Russian River Utility company (RRU), which has handled the physical parts of our water system under contract to the County since 1992, has recently made a proposal to assist in the development of an independent district and to run it. The FMA trustees are currently “running the numbers” on this proposal, and will be meeting on February 18th with representatives of RRU to get clarity on the option. Once the information gathering is complete, we will hold a meeting with residents. This will not be a fast process. Stay tuned!

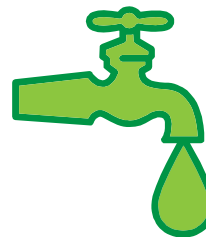
A third option is to stick with the status quo. The County is not forcing us to break away from their administration. We may decide to leave it “as is” and have the County continue running the district, but it seems prudent to seriously explore avenues that may be more cost-effective and efficient than the current setup.

Public works has given us a matrix outlining the district formation. Those of you who remember forming CSA 24 in 1976 will remember the process. It must be voted on by all homeowners and will require approval by LAFCO, the Local Agency Formation Commission. RRU has built into their proposal anticipated legal fees incurred by the formation.

Some Background on Water Rights: We were required to “tie in” with Healdsburg when the Camp Rose well was found to be too shallow and would have required an expensive water filtration system to be used. The 1992 agreement with Healdsburg states: “To allow City to pump water from the Russian River for the provision of water to County residents under County’s water rights application as long as this agreement between City and County is in effect.” (The original agreement was “in perpetuity.”)

FMA Officers and Trustees are reviewing well-documented records of the Association and communicating with Public Works to get a definitive answer on water rights.

You may request documents or direct questions to: donitaproctor@gmail.com.



From the (New) Editor

I took over the FMA newsletter production from Donita at the end of January. Happily, my predecessor had such a good thing going that I don't have to reinvent the wheel. I'm just striving to keep it rolling along, pumping in a little air now and then to keep the pages emerging smoothly and readably. Sylvia Seventy has volunteered to help in the endeavor also.

(I am retiring from my position as FMA Secretary in July, which opens a good "entry-level" service opportunity in the Association. The duties are taking/writing up meeting notes, keeping track of the membership, and sending out occasional messages to those on the e-mail list. I hope I'll leave the files, etc., in as good shape as Donita did for me as newsletter editor, so that it will be an easy transition. If you have questions about what is involved, get in touch with me or Laura before July!)

The newsletter has a somewhat random "printing" schedule—quarterly? bi-monthly? The advantage of being able to post it on our website is that we can put out a scheduled or a special edition of whatever length we want whenever the need arises or the mood strikes.

The FMA officers and trustees will give us the Association info that needs to be disseminated, but we also welcome poems, art, photos, and historical or current anecdotes from Mountain residents. Submit items via ellensilge@yahoo.com by the 5th of the month for publishing on or somewhat near the "ides" (the 15th of the month), depending on how well I battle my notorious procrastination tendencies.

The haiku at the left, by a Redwood Drive poet, fell victim to the erratic publishing schedule. To most appreciate it, project yourself back toward the Winter Solstice.

'Til the next issue,

Peace—Ellen

About FMA Membership

The Fitch Mountain Association fiscal/membership year goes from July to June, as reflected in the form above. If you paid your dues (\$20 per voting member) at last year's annual meeting in July, you are still a paid-up member. If you aren't a member now and want to join officially or help out unofficially, you can send in the dues now (or make a pro-rated contribution), but you'll still need to renew for the July 2012-June 2013 year.

Remember, FMA is open to all residents and friends of Fitch Mountain, whether property owners or not. Why would you want to join FMA? First, being a member will encourage you to take an active part in our fellowship, service and educational opportunities, and even leadership and decision-making roles. And, equally important, you'll feel good about supporting your Mountain community, and for only \$20. Such a deal!

(You don't have to be a member to access the informative website and our newsletter or receive timely "e-blasts" about Mountain issues and activities, but if you are a member and don't have internet access or simply prefer the traditional medium, we'll make sure you get a "hard copy" to hold in your hands.)



Dedicated to Residents of North Fitch Mountain

*Sun, in last short days,
Hovers over mountain top.
And soon, mountain wins.*

—Louisa Yates

www.FireFreeFitch.org

Have you checked out the great Fire Free Fitch website yet? A tremendous amount of potentially life-saving information is easily accessible there, including details on:

- Locating your neighborhood FFF group
- The “Broom Be Gone” program and how to borrow a broom wrench from FFF
- How to get 3 hours of free chipping
- How to order a reflective house number sign for only \$10. As the quotations on the site attest, clear, visible signage can make all the difference in responders finding you quickly in an emergency of any kind on Fitch Mountain, especially at night.

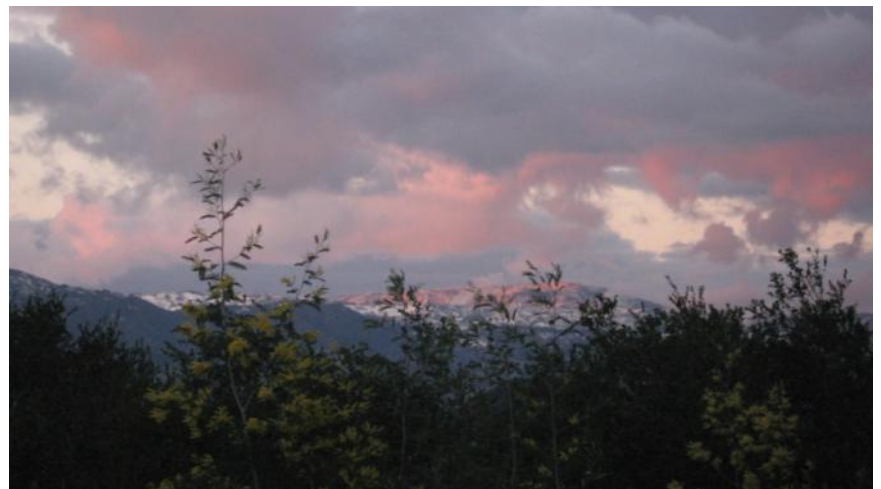
Note: A fire that destroyed vehicles and other property items at a rural residence off Mill Creek Road in mid-January was started by hot woodstove ashes left in a bucket on a wooden deck. Don't let this happen to you!

**Better
Animal Control**



A letter to the *Press Democrat* last fall recounted the regrets felt by a Forestville householder who called 9-1-1 when confronted in their driveway by a snarling badger. A county Animal Control officer came and shot the animal. The householder “feels terrible but figures she did the only thing she could do.”

Au contraire! **Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue** welcomes calls from people who feel threatened or frightened by wildlife. You can reach them at 526-9453 or, for after-hours crises, 486-0226. “We could have done something [nonlethal] about that badger,” says a Wildlife Rescue volunteer.



No, not this year...

[Taken from North Fitch Mountain Road near the Villa Chanticleer February 20, 2011. *Photos by EGS*]

Dues July 2012-June 2013	Become a new member	Dues \$20.00 per member
Name		
Address		
Phone		
E-mail		
Fitch Mountain Association P.O. Box 1233 Healdsburg, Ca. 95448		Amount enclosed: \$ _____
Donations are tax-deductible	California 501c #C093278	

About the Membership Form ...
(See page 4)



SAVE THE DATE!

**Join us Sunday July 8th at 1:00
at the Villa Chanticleer Picnic Area
for the FMA Annual Meeting!**



Al prepping picnic tables, and Donita painting them, at FMA "work party" at the Villa last spring