

The Newsletter of the



June 2022

It's Election Season!

The FMA is holding elections for President, Secretary, and two Trustees. The important calendar dates for voting are in the Timeline box below, and the details of the first event on the timeline are also page 1 news. Some words of explanation from two current FMA leaders who are seeking to serve in new roles are on page 2, and the official candidate statements are on page 3. But there's more than election news in this issue! Don't miss the COPE report (and freebies!) on page 4, water news and Villa picnic logistics on page 5, or the salute to retiring Fire Marshal and Division Chief Linda Collister and news of the Preserve on page 6.

The Timeline

Friday June 17: Deadline for renewing and new members to pay FMA membership dues to be eligible to vote for 2022 FMA Trustee and Officer candidates

Tuesday June 21: Virtual Town Hall and Meet the Candidates 5:30-6:30.

Wednesday June 22: Surveys/ballots sent to paid members. (Snail-mail ballots will be sent to the FMA members who don't have email.)

Tuesday July 5: 11:59 pm--Deadline for surveys to be completed

Sunday July 10: Annual Meeting 1:00-4:00 at the Villa—final voting & election results announced

The June 21st Virtual "Town Hall"

FMA is hosting our first Fitch Mountain Town Hall on Tuesday June 21 from 5:30- 6:30 p.m. via Zoom, to make sure we get to see and hear from all corners of the Fitch community.

We learned from the last two years, when we couldn't have our traditional face-to-face potluck meeting at the Villa, that Zoom allowed us to reach some Mountaineers who wouldn't have been able to come to the Villa that Sunday anyway. By going back to the in-person picnic this year (Sunday July 10), we worried that we'd leave some folks behind without a Zoom option. So, what to do? Both!

The town hall will be a mix of looking around the "room" at who's there, looking back on what we've all achieved over the past year and what we plan to work on next, introductions of the people running for FMA offices, and open discussion of topics brought up by attendees.

The Town Hall will be just an hour. It's not meant as an either/or with the Annual Meeting at the Villa—please come to both if you can! The Zoom link for the town hall will be sent out soon.

[*Pat Abercrombie and Heather Pilatic share some thoughts about the past FMA years and the coming one.*]

Pat — "It's been quite a ride."

I was elected President of the Fitch Mountain Association at the annual meeting in July 2017. I had been a Trustee for a year at that point. I wanted to get deeper into the work of the organization, such as broadening our partnerships with County agencies, public safety organizations, fire departments, other nonprofits, the new COPE group that was forming on the Mountain, and any others that could help the FMA serve the community.

Over the ensuing five years the FMA has partnered with Regional Parks on stabilizing and enhancing Del Rio Woods; with the City of Healdsburg and Healdsburg Fire on vastly improving fire safety in the City-owned Fitch Mountain Open Space Preserve; with a group of downriver communities on monitoring and challenging regulatory changes to our septic; with Fire Safe Sonoma on various vegetation management projects; with County public works on modernizing and improving our water system; and with COPE on reflective address signs and the new community fire risk signs on the approaches to the Mountain.

We've been through the Tubbs, Pocket, Kincade, Walbridge, and Glass fires together, and floods in 2017 and 2019. Together with the FMA's dedicated board and officers we've accomplished a ton during these challenging times, and we have a host of new irons in the fire (*read on below*). But recently I've run into a couple bumps in the road physically and I need to focus on those. I've stepped down as President and hope to return to a Trustee seat where I can stay involved in a bunch of stuff without carrying quite the same load. Thank you all for working with me to make the FMA stronger, and please hang in there with me as we continue.

Heather — "We all have a place here."

Here is the good news as I see it: Pat and others have built real partnerships and power for the FMA. As a result, we not only made it through five *tough* years; we have emerged stronger and better positioned to meet the climate-exacerbated challenges we face as an unincorporated community.

I believe we now need to root and distribute this power so that the Fitch Mountain community can keep its seat at the table in a way that taps a bigger cross-section of this community. FMA needs to become more adept at speaking not only from the perspective of our intrepid regulars who show up to every meeting and have a high tolerance for committee work, but also from the lived experience of our community members who are not "joiners," who are working when most County meetings are scheduled, who do not live here full time but still count this place and these neighbors as among those cared for – neighbors with whom we may not agree, but who still count as neighbors precisely because *we all have a place here*.

When decisions are being made that affect us all, it is important that we know they are coming, have time to understand the stakes, and are given an opportunity to weigh in. For that to happen, we need to build more robust engagement and participation.

There are tools and practices that can help FMA do this well. We are mid-stream in building them out. Concretely, this is what FMA's online communication work has been about under my service tenure as Trustee: reaching a broader membership swath, in a two-way kind of way. Perhaps this has not been obvious, but FMA's new email tool and coming online presence are about more than broadcasting, or "disseminating" messages. We are also always looking for feedback and listening loops to keep us honest.

Making sure that the FMA is deeply and widely rooted in the entire membership base has been my particular focus in part because it is my professional background, but also because it is what FMA needs right now in its evolution as an organization representing the interests of *this* particular community.

The Fitch that I know is a funky, fluid mix with a pronounced "live and let live" character that runs alongside a fierce sense of place. This is the community I have come to know and love in my ten years on the Mountain. This is the spirit in which I try to walk and work. I hope you'll keep showing up in whatever way is yours so we can work together.

2022 FMA Elections

The FMA is holding elections for President, Secretary, and two Trustees. The candidates whose statements appear below have met all the requirements and deadline for running; no “write-ins” will be counted.

Heather Pilatic President Candidate

I’m running because I believe we do better when we work together and hold both ourselves and our county officials accountable to a model of servant leadership. My hope is to continue bringing my experience in nonprofit management and community engagement to bear in support of making FMA a more robust, sustainable, and capable organization that is fitted to the work it undertakes. I offer a year’s service as President to bring that organizational development work to a good hand-off point. As with the Trusteeship, I view this role through a two-fold lens of ensuring accountability and building community resilience.

Dana Hampson Trustee Candidate

I’m running for Trustee of the FMA. My husband Kalei and I have lived on the mountain for 2.5 years and feel lucky to call this magical place home. I have had several amazing opportunities to serve the community since I arrived in Sonoma County in 2018, including working with Corazón Healdsburg, the County & Fire Service Working Group on the Fire & Emergency Services Proposed Tax Measure, TEDx Sonoma County, and of course the FMA in my role as Secretary. I would welcome the opportunity to continue to serve our residents as Trustee of the FMA.

Caitlin B. O’Connell Secretary Candidate

We moved to Fitch Mountain summer 2021 to return to nature, we craved space. The beauty and towering trees called to us, but we discovered a sense of community that we didn’t realize we had been missing. Strangers became friends with ease, and introductions made and bonds strengthened through dog walking, trail cleaning, and afternoons at the river. Working from home allows me the freedom to dedicate time, energy, and organization to the role of secretary and I hope to continue building and supporting the Fitch Mountain community we have grown to love.

Pat Abercrombie Trustee Candidate (1 yr.)

I am running to complete the remaining one year of an FMA trustee position. Having been president for the past five years, I have a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities the FMA faces right now. I believe wholeheartedly in the FMA, its members and leaders and believe I can parlay my understanding, experience and the relationships I have developed inside the organization, with members and leaders, and with the partners we have in County government and public service agencies, to help accomplish more. And to support the development of FMA into a more sustainable and effective organization.

FMA Memberships

If you haven’t already, please renew your membership or join the FMA for the first time! Renters, residents, family cabin members, and parcel owners on the non-City side of Fitch Mountain can join or renew as voting members. If you don’t own or rent a place on the unincorporated (County) part of the Mountain, join the newly designated “Fitch Friends and Family” for access to everything the FMA offers except voting and running for office. June 17th is the deadline for renewing/joining FMA in time for voting. You can pay FMA dues or join Fitch Friends and Family for free on the website (<http://www.FitchMtn.org>).

And to the many fine folks who have already renewed/joined as members or signed up as Fitch Friends and Family, THANK YOU!



COPE—Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergencies

COPE Fitch Mountain is an affiliate of COPE Northern Sonoma County (NoSoCo). Did you know that Fitch Mountain has 19 COPE leaders organized by neighborhoods? We meet regularly to continually improve our preparation for various emergencies, fire being the most obvious. The foundation of this successful, and highly acclaimed, grassroots organization is “Neighbors Helping Neighbors.” To learn more about COPE, visit the FMA website (www.FitchMtn.org), where you can find general information and a listing of the leaders by neighborhood. Another excellent resource is the newly updated website for COPE NoSoCo:

<https://copenorthernsonomacounty.org>.

Fitch Mountain has a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and COPE FM has been updating and revising its Annual Action Plan. Objectives and strategies are being developed in the areas of Advocacy, Emergency Communication, Organizational Effectiveness, Fuel Management, Outreach and Education, and Community Infrastructure.

Good News: COPE NoSoCo, in conjunction with the Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District, was awarded a CalFire Wildfire Prevention Grant. The project, Northern Sonoma County Public Evacuation Corridor Protection, will address roadside vegetation management in three geographic areas—Fitch Mountain, Toyon, and Soda Rock.

It’s great to see our fire danger signs fully operational at both the North and South entrances. In addition to general maintenance, the fire danger level adjustments and messaging are managed by your COPE Fire Sign Squad volunteers.

Our Fire Marshal and Division Chief, Linda Collister, retired in May after 15 years of service. She is a true friend of the Mountain and was the perfect liaison to COPE. Community connection and collaboration, fire prevention, and fire protection were high priorities on her watch. You can read more about her in Pat’s article on page 6.

Have you seen our Community Wild Fire Protection Plan (CWPP)? Check it out on our website (fitchmtn.org) under **Fire Prevention**.

Ambulance EMTs, firefighters, sheriff deputies, and police all cite the challenges of locating addresses in a rural locale like ours. COPE and FMA are partnering to help the emergency responders by increasing the number of reflective house signs on the Mountain. Is your property well signed? It’s easy to get one (or two), and right now they’re free! Read on!

Freebies!

The FMA is giving away the next 50 reflective signs ordered, up to two signs per household. To download the order form, go to <http://www.FitchMtn.org> and click on **Reflective House # Signs** at the top of the column on the left. You can submit your form without payment; mail it to Fitch Mountain Association; P.O. Box 1233; Healdsburg, CA 95448, or scan and email as an attachment to fitchmountainassociation@gmail.com.

Annual Meeting/Potluck Picnic Logistics

The July 10th in-person (hurray!) FMA Annual Meeting at the Villa Chanticleer picnic area has a gathering time of 1:00. (Please let me know at ellensilge@yahoo.com or 707 431-0814 if you can come at 12:00 to help set up!) The picnic will begin at 1:30, and the official meeting gets underway at 2:15. (Enticing program details will be sent out soon, as well as some way to give us an idea of how many people to expect.)

Please bring some food to share according to the first letter of your surname: A – I, dessert or fruit; J – R, picnic main dish (sandwiches?); S – Z, salad or side dish. The FMA will be providing a variety of canned sodas and sparkling waters. You may bring your own beverage if you prefer, but remember that this is a no-alcohol venue.

The FMA will provide paper plates and cups and the green-bin bags they can be composted in. You are welcome to bring more substantial take-home plates, etc., if you prefer, but please, no non-recyclable throw-aways. We have 80 sets of “silverware,” so don’t worry about flatware.

—Ellen Silge, Fun & Appreciation Chair

FMA Water District Advisory Committee (WDAC)

Since our January newsletter, we have made progress in various system rehabilitation projects. Our quarterly meetings are held with Sonoma County Public Works. Here are some highlights from the past year.

Water Tank Replacement – Our three 100,000-gallon water tanks are 30 years old and made of wood. We are working with the County to tap federal grant money to replace them with bolted steel tanks. It may take a couple years, but we’re working on it.

Telemetry Upgrade – You probably wouldn’t be surprised to hear that there are lots of electronics associated with a little water system like ours. During the past year the last of our residential meters were converted to digital. The electronics that monitor the water level of our tanks and the pumps that keep them full (known as SCADA) were upgraded and made more resilient by adding solar power.

GMRS Radio Repeater – Thanks to COPE, we were able to join a project to install General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) repeaters in communities with Emergency Preparedness programs. Repeaters serve as hubs to allow radio operators who would not be able to communicate to connect even in challenging topography like ours. The Fitch Mountain repeater is being installed near the Hilltop water tank and will share solar and battery power with the SCADA system there.

Vegetation Management – Dangerous vegetation that had built up around the three water tanks was removed in an aggressive fire fuel mitigation project last winter.

Pump Station Resiliency – Some key pumps that keep our water tanks full and our system pressurized did not have back-up electrical power in the event of a power outage. A new generator and propane supply were installed on South Fitch last year.

Happenings in the FM Open Space Preserve

We're certainly going to miss Fire Marshal and Division Chief Linda Collister, who retired in May! Thanks to her efforts, \$500,000 was granted by the Coastal Conservancy for fire fuel mitigation in the Fitch Mountain Preserve. You probably remember the goats that were the first step in the operation. The picture of Collister below was taken July 4, 2021, when the goats were first released at the Villa.



The goats were followed by the Northern Sonoma County Fuels Crew, who have done a tremendous amount of fuel removal this year, mostly near the top of the Mountain. In conjunction with the Fuels Crew, Eric Dicke was brought in to use his masticator along the ridge at the summit. Much of this accumulated vegetation debris was gathered into piles and burned, first in early December of last year and then again at the end of April this year.

The Fuels Crew will continue to work between the Butterfly Trail and the summit this year. A prescribed "broadcast burn," meaning fire on the ground, is planned for later in the year when the weather conditions are favorable.

In addition to this professional fuels work, the City of Healdsburg renewed their contract with LandPaths to organize volunteer stewardship workdays in the Preserve. So far these have been broom-pulling events along the main fire road and near the Mothers' Grove. These may shift to drainage maintenance when it's too dry to pull broom.

Keep your eyes on LandPath's website (<https://www.landpaths.org>) for these and other hands-on opportunities to steward our open spaces.

And, fear not—former Healdsburg firefighter Lance MacDonald has returned to take over Chief Collister's role as Fire Marshal/Division Chief. Welcome, Lance!

—Pat Abercrombie



**Do you know
where this is?**