

The Newsletter of the



January 2023

President's Message: Showing Up Is "Magic Sauce"

When we show up, we get things done. Not all of the things, but a lot of the things.

We are but one of many unincorporated communities in California, most of which developed their built environment in the post-war boom without adequate infrastructure or planning. That's why FMA exists, to see to the many pieces of local, municipal services-type governance that we have to rely on a disjointed patchwork of County and other agencies and authorities to provide because we are not a city. Think roads, septic, water, fire protection, parks and recreation, and so on. It's why folks continually mistake FMA for some kind of Homeowners Association. But we are not an HOA. HOA's have legal agreements (CC&Rs) that attach to property title, deliver services in exchange for fees, and have rules about where you can put trash cans and what color you can paint your house. We are not a ruly bunch. But we care, and we show up, and we make noise – and these are all things I love about this place.

We can't get the things done if we don't know about them though, or if we don't feel like we belong to this place at least as much as it belongs to us. So FMA exists also to build this sense of belonging by staying in touch about a lot of the things. We have committees to track the bouncing ball on ongoing issues like roads, septic, water, Del Rio Woods (i.e., our park). We liaise with the City of Healdsburg about the Fitch Mountain Preserve. FMA and COPE are working jointly to continue carrying on the work of fire and emergency preparedness for and with this community. These bundles of work require sustained, ongoing (sometimes nerdy) commitment.

All are welcome. We need more bodies. And hearts, and minds. Because our community has to stick together if we are to make it through the long emergency of a weirding climate (replete with whipsaw precipitation patterns and wildfire).

Often we need help with the fun, one-off things like stewardship work days, Chipper days, party planning, and chili-making. Just showing up for a day to work or visit alongside neighbors is the juice that sustains the whole operation. "Showing up is magic sauce," as my favorite 9-year-old says.

So we are working on a shared leadership structure that relies upon a "working board," rather than a governing board with an unsustainable President role that loads far too much on the back of one person. There are only so many Pats in the world; and anyway, the "great man" model of leadership is about as defunct as the "great man" theory of history.

Why am I rambling on about history, historiography, and municipal services? Because it seems to me that folks don't always understand what the FMA is, and why it matters that we all show up. We're not an HOA and we're not a social club. We are a community with a strong sense of place that has to stick together to make sure we get the things we need and deserve to thrive, stay safe, and caretake the river, the mountain, and each other.

Let's start with chili and Fitch Mountain Bingo on February 5th, and go from there?

Yours, Heather Pilatic

FMA By the Numbers

Membership: We have over 200 individual members representing nearly 100 of this mountain's 340 unincorporated households. Our community is even broader, with nearly 20 Friends & Family of Fitch, and over 500 people on our email list. If you're not on the list, join up: that's how we keep in touch these days.

Email FMA Secretary Caitlin O'Connell to either join the email list or renew your membership:
caitlinboc@gmail.com

Funds Balance as of 12/31/22:

Checking Account: \$18,270

Reserves: \$4,000

Grand Total: \$22,270

Winter Fun Night February 5th

Where: Villa Chanticleer Annex

When: Sunday Feb. 5th from 4-6:30 (Volunteers are welcome to come at 3:15 to help set up!)

The Program:

Chili cook-off: You sample all four and vote for your favorite.

Potluck-style dinner: Chili is the main dish; folks can bring small bites, an appetizer, salad, or dessert to make it a meal. The FMA will provide soft drinks, hot and cold, but if you don't like to drink your coffee out of a paper cup, you should bring your favorite mug.

Mixer: Find Somebody Who...

F-M-A Bingo: Three rounds each for the Letters and a Blackout finale. (Fun "White Elephant" items for "Letter Bingo" prizes are welcome.)



Questions? Contact Ellen Silge at 707 431-0814 (landline)
or ellensilge@yahoo.com.

Roads, Roads, Roads

Advocating for the care of our roads seems like a slog right now. The FMA Road Safety Committee (RSC) continues to focus on two things: (1) paving and striping and (2) the Slump & Slide. South Fitch Mountain Road was paved, which was great. But our roads are so narrow and windy that the centerline striping got all tangled up with the arcane CalTrans regulations governing them (Google MUTCD if you dare). We are working with Transportation and Public Works (TPW) to get approval from the State for a pilot project applying a variant of striping and reflectors that better suits our road. If it is approved, it will retroactively be applied to South Fitch and we hope they'll use it on North Fitch too, once it gets paved (keep reading).

The Slump & Slide project has progressed to the Right-of-Way acquisition phase whereby the County must reimburse any property owners directly affected by the construction. Once that is complete, construction can start. The RSC was promised a project plan and schedule from TPW at a recent meeting called by Supervisor Gore, who is tracking the project with us. We will share it with you when we receive it.

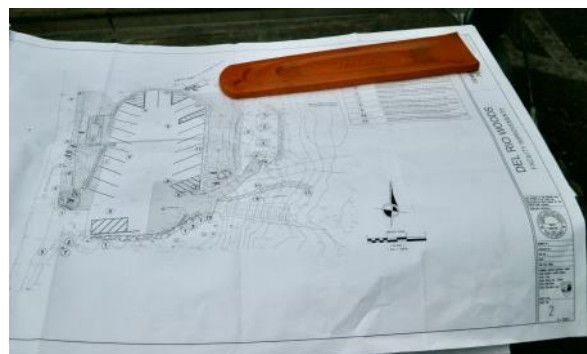
Since completion of the Slump & Slide is so far behind expectations, TPW has agreed to pave, and stripe, North Fitch from Del Rio Woods to the Slide next summer. You will see preparations for that in the coming months.

Del Rio Woods Improvements, Round 2

After the first round of Del Rio improvements in 2017, there wasn't enough money to complete three components of the overall project: (1) an ADA-compliant pathway from the parking lot to the edge of the gravel bar, (2) an ADA-compliant stairway replacement, and (3) an interpretive sign describing the history of Del Rio Woods and another on local flora and fauna. So we had to wait for more funds to accumulate. FMA's Del Rio Committee recently learned that Regional Parks has begun exploring these delayed pieces of the project. The first step will be penciling out costs of things like concrete and lumber. If funds are sufficient, they will request proposals to do the work and bid the jobs. So, improvements are coming, but don't plan to use the new stairway until maybe 2025.



A look back....



CSA41—Water District & System Hardening

The FMA Water District Advisory Committee meets quarterly with the County and the system operator, Russian River Utility. System hardening projects like the backup generator on So. Fitch at Latimer Rd. and upgrades to the electronic monitoring systems at the pumps and tanks were the focus of 2022.

Of more long-term significance was the application to FEMA for funding to replace our redwood water storage tanks with bolted steel ones. We are anxiously awaiting their decision. If it moves forward, this will be a historic project. We'll keep you posted.

Arundo Donax Removal along the River

FMA is working with the Russian Riverkeeper to engage community members along the river for removal of Arundo Donax (a.k.a. "Giant Reed") this winter. The project, developed in conjunction with Healdsburg Fire, calls for removal along 200 acres of the Russian River from Rio Lindo up to the 101.

As you likely know, Arundo is a wildly flammable water hog that looks a lot like bamboo. It drinks a million gallons of water per acre – that's more than any other plant on the Russian River. This one, thirsty invasive more than doubles the fuel load for wildfire along our river's banks as well as displacing native plants and wildlife. FMA's role here is to facilitate sign-ups for removal work parties and answer questions through community outreach. Please drop me a line with questions. Heather.Pilatic@gmail.com

"In the late 1940s we were told to plant [Arundo] by the County and the Army Corps of Engineers to protect the bank; we had continual damage to our banks caused by the huge holes left by Basalt Gravel when they periodically dredged for the gravel. Our banks were pulled down during the winter to fill up those huge holes.

"Now it will be great to get rid of Arundo, which both sucks water from the river and is a fire hazard."

—Lar Landa



Arundo pulled from the riverbank by Redwood Drive (January 2023)



"Fern Falls" photo by Rhonda Bellmer

Fire Risk Reduction on the Mountain: Fire District Annexation & Stewardship in the Preserve

The long-anticipated annexation of Fitch Mountain into the Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District (NSCFPD) was *finally* passed with a unanimous vote of the LAFCO commissioners on December 7th. The Fitch Mountain community should pat themselves on the back for staying on top of this and stepping up when pressure needed to be applied to keep the process from bogging down. Congratulations all!

This really matters because now all of our fire-directed property taxes will return to Fitch Mountain. And we will have more direct influence on how they get spent. We already have a strong relationship with the NSCFPD and their highly regarded and innovative Fuels Crew, through vegetation management projects along the roads and, in collaboration with Healdsburg City, in the Fitch Mountain Open Space Preserve.

Not directly associated with the annexation but worth noting is the relationship the FMA has with LandPaths. After a couple lean years during which the Transient Occupancy Taxes that fund the preserve dried up due to Covid, the City of Healdsburg recently renewed their contract with LandPaths for stewardship of the Fitch Mountain Preserve. LandPaths is once again hosting workdays in the Preserve, mainly focused on clearing French broom and other non-native species that proliferate and become a fire hazard if not controlled.

FMA plans to augment LandPaths' schedule of events with additional stewardship work parties this spring to try to make up for the loss of momentum during the pandemic – and to build an ongoing community of care-takers for the Mountain. Please plan to come out and lend a hand. Keep an eye on your inbox for notices from FMA's email listserv.

“Part of the reason for the 2022 fire season being relatively uneventful is that community organizations like COPE and FMA have raised their residents’ awareness of the importance of fire safety. Greater awareness leads to fewer ignitions.”

– Chief Marshall Turberville

FMA Officers & Trustees Roster

Officers:

Heather Pilatic, President (cell 415 694-8596; heather.pilatic@gmail.com)

Grayson Hartley, Vice-President (707 287-1631, graysonhartley@gmail.com)

Caitlin O’Connell, Secretary (917 971-1995, caitlinboc@gmail.com)

Marty Silge, Treasurer (707 431-0814; martinsilge@yahoo.com)

Trustees:

Pat Abercrombie (707 473-8217, cell 415 509-4589; patabercrombie@comcast.net)

Rhonda Bellmer (cell 707 529-8383; rbellmer@me.com)

Dana Hampson (mcknightdana2@gmail.com)

Fergus O’Sullivan (707 473-8335, cell 415 240-5588; kilbree@gmail.com)

Floodwatch

As rain begins
it starts with a swirl
on the satellite map
then people whisk
turbulence on their tongues
into stiff peaks of dread.
Birds go silent to eavesdrop
on the gossip of trees
who know one of them will fall
and take the power out,
flatten a car, or pierce a roof,
rendering their wondrous lives
maligned in death.

As rain picks up
water will sprout from the hillside
perhaps a rock the size of a car
will pull away from the mountain
and block the road.
Without doubt, the river
will come up and test your mettle
in the middle of the night
when you can hear
its thundering applause
but see only what the beam
from your flashlight shows.
The marker you staked
in your yard has disappeared
under the advancing opaque water.
It is time to say whether
to move everything
to high ground or stay put.

As the rain keeps falling
your animal instincts take over.
You remember the year
the stand of new daffodils
held the river at bay,
got her to retreat.
You begin to call
on your unseen friends
to help with the task
of persuading the river
to leave your home alone.

Stocking up on candles
in the store earlier
a woman volunteered
*I don't feel sorry for those people
who live where it floods*
You know what she means —
only she has no way of knowing,
but you don't choose the river,
the river chooses you.

By Penelope La Montagne
(May 26, 1948—March 23, 2018)

[Reprinted from the FMA Jan. 2013 NL]



We are so grateful that 2022 was a relatively quiet year in terms of local fire risk. Of course, Mother Nature played a significant role in keeping us safe, and there is much that we, as a COPE Community, can take credit for as well. Most of us did our part by clearing debris and other fuels from our property; many also implemented basic home-hardening techniques to further protect our homes.

COPE (Communities Organized to Prepare for Emergencies) is about “neighbors helping neighbors.” Its mission is to help residents, families, and visitors prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. COPE Northern Sonoma County (NoSoCo) has groups stretching north from Windsor to Cloverdale, and from Stewarts Point west to Knights Valley east.

COPE Fitch Mountain (FM) is organized into 19 neighborhoods with leaders assigned to each. We meet regularly to plan and better prepare for emergencies, with fire as a main emphasis. Two of our most notable achievements in 2022 were (1) working with FMA on an emergency communications system with General Mobil Radio Service (GMRS) to facilitate communications within, as well as outside of, Fitch Mtn. in the event of a severe emergency; and (2) establishing a procedure to ensure the fire hazard signs on North and South Fitch Mt Rd are maintained and regularly updated.

Our COPE FM Community Leaders were honored by COPE NoSoCo at a holiday luncheon. Chiefs Marshall Turbeville and Lance McDonald both sang the praises of COPE’s grassroots efforts and successful partnership with the fire departments.

To learn more about COPE and emergency preparedness, or to get involved, a great resource is:

<http://copenorthernsonomacounty.org>