

Southwest Shore Healthy Forest Association

Summary: The Forest Service is planning on expanding the fire prevention area around each cabin, to a 100-foot perimeter, which is more than triple the current distance. This will require brush clearance, weed control, tree pruning and other fire safety measures. Normally any such work would be solely the responsibility and expense of the cabin owner. However, we have received an offer from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) that would award a conservation grant that should be sufficient to cover the full costs of hiring (on a group basis) a contractor to do the work for all cabins of the Southwest Shore area. The grant project would include thinning out of overcrowded trees and oversized brush, pruning of lower branches of trees, brush removal, etc. This work would be coordinated with a much larger Forest Service “Healthy Forest” project that will cover all SW Shore areas not covered by the outside of the 100’ cabin perimeter, and the entire slope above the Southwest Shore cabins, all the way to the highest ridge line. We will need to create a new association of cabin owners for the purpose of receiving and disbursing the grant funds, coordinating with the Forest Service and the contractor, and assisting cabin owners who may have special requests such as protecting privacy screens. This new association will cover not only the cabins within the Southwest Shore Colony Historic District, but also the additional 20 or so non-Colony cabins located above the highway.

Details:

1. Natural State of the Forest: Forests in their natural pre-1900 state generally remained healthy as they were subjected to periodic fires that would thin the forest, suppress undergrowth and dispose of brush and dead wood on the ground. Such fires in a healthy forest periodically reduced fire fuels and smaller trees that would otherwise compete with the taller trees for water and soil nutrients, so that the next fires would burn cooler, and burn closer to the ground rather than reach into the crowns of the taller trees.
2. Unhealthy Forest Conditions: Governmental fire suppression practices over the past 100 years have resulted in unhealthy forests, characterized by far too many trees per acre, with the crowded conditions stressing all trees due to over-competition for water and nutrients, making them more vulnerable to drought and insect-borne diseases and less resistant to fire. It also resulted in a dangerous buildup of fire fuels on the ground and of smaller trees capable of carrying fire into the crowns of the taller trees. These unhealthy forest conditions have made modern forest fires tend to burn much hotter, higher, and faster, even creating their own high winds in fire storms that are next to impossible to contain and thus more damaging to the forest and to human life and the built environment.
3. New Policy, Return to Natural Forest Conditions: Governmental policy is now belatedly focusing upon protecting developed areas (such as the Big Bear Valley) by reducing volatile fire fuels in the adjacent forests by manually thinning that forest back into its natural state and removing fire fuels on the ground. Where this has

been done, the old growth trees have become much healthier and disease-resistant. It has also proven effective in reducing and preventing wildfire damage because as wildfires roar into the thinned area they are calmed and slowed significantly due to the reduced fire fuels, permitting the leading edges of the fires to be suppressed and vulnerable homes and towns protected. These principles are also important in reducing the speed and destructive force even for local fires that may start within the treated areas.

4. “Healthy Forest” Initiatives: The Forest Service and other Federal agencies have been engaging in such major “healthy forest” initiatives in the Big Bear area, starting with a large swath of forest on the north-facing slopes about the City of Big Bear Lake, all the way up to the ridgeline. They are now planning to continue westward with that project, treating all open forest areas above the developed areas all the way upslope to the highest ridges.
5. New Requirements for Cabin Fire Protection: Within the next year or so, the Forest Service will be expanding cabin owner brush clearance/fire prevention distance to **100’** around each cabin (that perimeter is currently 30’). Compliance with new setback rules would normally be at the cabin owner’s sole responsibility and expense.
6. Government Grant: However, there is an opportunity for us, as a group, to obtain **full federal funding** to pay for the increased perimeter work. The U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (**NRCS**) has offered to award our cabins a grant that they believe will be sufficient to cover all costs. The Federal grant funds would be used by our Association to hire a contractor to perform substantial work around each cabin to remove brush, trim lower branches from trees, remove dead trees and remove overcrowding trees. This does not at all mean clear-cutting all trees and shrubs – it simply means extending the current fire prevention and containment practices to a larger area surrounding the cabin. Past experience under the Healthy Forest initiative has been that the grant amount has been sufficient to cover all costs. Before making a final commitment for the program, we will be able to confirm that all costs will be covered.
7. Coordination With Larger Project of Forest Service: This cabin perimeter work would be performed by the same contractors whom the Forest Service (under a separate contract) will be hiring to perform the same thinning services in all areas not within cabin perimeters, and also up the hill above the SW Shore all the way to the crest of the mountains to that rise above the SW Shore. If all goes well with funding, the work would be performed during the Summer of 2014.
8. Cabin Owner Control: We would build in protection for individual cabin owners, as all trees proposed to be cut would first be marked, permitting owner special requests to save trees or limit their pruning (such as the desire to retain a privacy screen between

cabins) to be accommodated.

9. New Association: The funding agency selected our area for this grant proposal because they were advised by the Forest Service that our cabin area has a history of effective project coordination. In order to facilitate this project, we need to create a new single-purpose non-profit association comprised of the cabin owners, which we propose to call the **Southwest Shore Healthy Forest Association**. It would be authorized to accept the grant funds and disburse them to the contractor(s). Any excess funds would be limited to use only for ongoing similar healthy forest needs (such as dead tree removal). The new association would be separate and independent of the continuing SW Shore Colony Association.

10. Membership, and By-laws Adoption: The new association membership would automatically include all owners of cabins on the Southwest Shore, including all of those above the highway in addition to all of those below the highway, but it is a voluntary association so that members may withdraw from membership at any time. No dues or assessments are expected, and would be voluntary in any case. All area cabins are eligible to vote as to whether to form the new association to pursue and administer these grant funds (one vote per cabin). The voting will be conducted by email unless the cabin owner requests to vote by regular mail. Enclosed are the proposed By-laws of the new Southwest Shore Healthy Forest Association. [Insert voting procedures, dates etc.] [We are building in a three-week “comments and questions” period prior to the voting deadline?]