

GORSE CONTROL MEETING IN CASPAR, MAY 3, '07

Summary by Caroline Schooley <schooley@mcn.org>

A working group met recently to discuss gorse control; the emphasis was on its serious fire potential. Present were representatives of the Caspar Community, Mendocino State Parks, Jughandle Creek Farm, Mendocino Land Trust, the Bureau of Land Management, and others (see below). All agreed that the major gorse removals along Caspar Point Road by Fred Wong, Lucy Lequin, and Jughandle State Park in '06-'07 provide a unique opportunity to complete eradication of a serious hazard.

State Parks Mendocino District Superintendent Marilyn Murphy and Resource Manager Rene Pasquinelli attended and there was a review of past gorse suppression activities as well as goals and funding for future efforts in Jughandle State Reserve and other nearby parks. The clearing of gorse at the south end of Jughandle Reserve was gratefully acknowledged by all present. There was discussion of the importance of followup work. Burning of the brush now piled up from the recent removal work will be annoying and dangerous, and Superintendent Murphy made a welcome suggestion about use of "air curtain burners", which are dumpster-like containers. She has some experience with that equipment and said she would look into its availability. The question of liability for losses to private property from fires spreading from state property was raised but not resolved.

The Fort Bragg Fire Dept. responds to fires north of Road 409. Its Chief, Steve Orsi, could not attend but submitted: *"I strongly believe that there is a severe fire hazard and if something is not done to control/remove the gorse, Caspar will see a devastating fire event that will cost a tremendous amount of money to contain and extinguish (not to mention the loss to the property owners)."* Dean Watson of CDF and Danny Hervilla of the Mendocino Fire Dept. were present and agreed; they offered specific advice:

1) Install a "dry hydrant", capable of delivering 1500 gallons/minute. The source would be the Caspar pond and the hydrant could be there (or elsewhere). This need not be a pressurized system; responding fire engines can supply the pumping power. (Such a water source might eventually improve our fire insurance rates.)

2) Though the gorse infestation map produced by Mendocino County Weed Management indicates the extent of the gorse problem, there is need for a more detailed map showing specific gorse infestation areas and their extent. An emergency map should be created showing the locations of roads, houses, private water storage tanks, and housebound residents. Copies should go to all local fire agencies; a really big fire will bring firefighters who don't know our area. (Ray Duff is working on such a map as part of Caspar disaster preparedness, but he'll need a lot of help to make it comprehensive.)

3) Remove *all* gorse completely; mowing just encourages its root system to spread. This requires multi-year followup removal of sprouts. The gorse hedges and the remaining solid gorse areas along Caspar Road and Caspar Point Road are a particular concern; a road accident could easily start a fire.

4) Maintain a 100' "defensible space" around all houses. This is a new (2006) state law; see <http://www.cdflmu.org/4291.pdf> for the text of the law, and these URLs for detail: <http://www.wildfireprograms.com/search.html?displayId=60>
http://www.fire.ca.gov/education_100foot.php
http://www.fire.ca.gov/about_content/downloads/Defens_space_flyer4_11final

Chief Watson pointed out that because of the particularly dangerous incendiary nature of gorse that a 200 foot perimeter from gorse brush would be more appropriate than the general 100' requirement. (Regrettably, even the 100' clearance requirement only applies within the house property; it doesn't extend to gorse within 100', but on a neighboring parcel. BIG loophole, leading to serious liability questions if there really is a fire.)

Helene Chalfin of Jughandle Farm pointed out that gorse had spread again from Jughandle Reserve state property and adjoining Tregoning property back into Farm land. She pointed out the importance of coordinated removal efforts.

Julie Rogers of the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council discussed the gorse eradication proposal that the county Fire Safe Council submitted to the Bureau of Land Management in April. It wasn't approved, and she pointed out that all of the proposals that *were* successful were sponsored by local Fire Safe Councils. She suggested that Caspar form one, within the structure of the county Council (to eliminate lots of paperwork). All present thought that to be a good idea; it was understood that a local Caspar Fire Safe Council would serve as an umbrella organization for applications for federal and state grant funding. It would represent a unifying voice in an ongoing effort to get gorse under strict control in our community.

Chiefs Watson and Hervilla both discussed the unpredictable nature of wildfires in gorse, indicating that because of the intense heat generated conventional containment and suppression tactics are usually not possible. Superintendent Murphy suggested that creating fire safe zones and access corridors and writing containment plans would be valuable preparation strategies. (A Caspar Fire Safe Council can work on this.) Ms. Rogers, with input from Guil Dye who had recently spoken with the BLM region manager, stated her hope that BLM funding will be available next year, and said she intends it to be the Fire Safe Council's number one priority for funding. Her efforts against gorse were gratefully acknowledged.

Tara Athan, Coordinator of the Mendocino County Weed Management Area, said that she is actively looking for other gorse control funding. Her past and ongoing efforts to obtain funding against gorse were gratefully acknowledged.

A successful campaign will be expensive; hopefully, grant sources can be found. As a first step, an archive of past proposals and other information will be assembled.

Want to help? **VOLUNTEERS WELCOME!** Contact the Caspar Community office.

[This report was presented to the Caspar Community at its June '07 meeting. The group agreed that a Caspar Fire Safe Council is a good idea; one will be organized.]