

# City of San Diego Brush Management Regulations

*See also Bulletin #2:  
Use of Goats for  
Brush Management*

## **BULLETIN #1: BRUSH MANAGEMENT GUIDE For Private Property**



**February 2006**

The City of San Diego has over 900 linear miles of urban wildland interface, where the back yards of homes meet the natural vegetation in canyons. Years of drought have increased the flammability of this vegetation. During certain times of the year, native vegetation can pose a wildfire risk and requires proper management to prevent future tragedies. This Bulletin describes actions you and your family should take to reduce your chances of being affected if a wildfire ever occurs near you.

### **SAN DIEGO'S UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT**

San Diego's semi-arid natural environment contains low-growing brush called *coastal sage scrub* or *chaparral*, which is home to many rare and endangered plants and animals. In fact, San Diego has more sensitive species than anywhere in the continental United States. Fire is an integral part of the ecology of this environment; the vegetation needs periodic burning to regenerate. *Fire becomes a potential problem where there are homes located next to the native vegetation.* But, you can create a *defensible space* around your home that can slow the fire down, giving firefighters crucial time and space to protect your home.

### **CREATING "DEFENSIBLE SPACE"**

*Defensible Space* is the landscape between your house and the potential fuel source (natural brush) that it is your responsibility as a homeowner to maintain to reduce fire risk. The City's Municipal Code\* regulates brush management and creates two *Brush Management Zones* with different requirements. The Code was amended in October 2005 to make these Zones total 100 feet of defensible space from the structure throughout the City. ***Although these amendments do not apply in the Coastal Overlay Zone until adopted by the Coastal Commission (Spring 2006), the Fire Chief recommends voluntary compliance.***

**Brush Management Zone 1 is typically 35 feet from the structure (25-35 feet in the Coastal Zone, until The Coastal Commission adopts changes), on the flatter part of the property next to your house.**

#### **ZONE 1:**

- ✓ Must be irrigated or watered regularly
- ✓ Must consist mostly of ornamental vegetation like lawns, low-growing shrubs, some trees, with not more than 10% native or naturalized vegetation.
- ✓ Trees and large shrubs must be pruned away from structures and roofs.
- ✓ Any wooden structures in Zones 1 and 2 ( such as decks, or fences ) not having a 1-hour fire resistance rating or built of combustible materials, must be removed.
- ✓ Irrigation from Zone 1 must not run onto Zone 2 (it encourages weed growth).

**Brush Management Zone 2 is the remaining 65 feet from your structure ( 20 - 50 feet in the Coastal Zone, until the Coastal Commission adopts changes ), and is usually comprised of natural vegetation.**

#### **ZONE 2:**

- ✓ Can have NO permanent irrigation.
- ✓ Must be *thinned and pruned* regularly to reduce vegetation by 50%, without harming native plants, soil or habitats, as described on the reverse side of this Bulletin.

*NOTE: Brush management is not allowed in coastal sage scrub during the California gnatcatcher nesting season, March 1 through August 15. This small bird only lives in coastal sage scrub and is listed as a threatened species by the federal government. Any harm to this bird could result in fines and penalties.*

*(over)*

## HOW TO THIN AND PRUNE BRUSH IN ZONE 2

**Step 1: Remove** ....as much of the dead wood as you can.

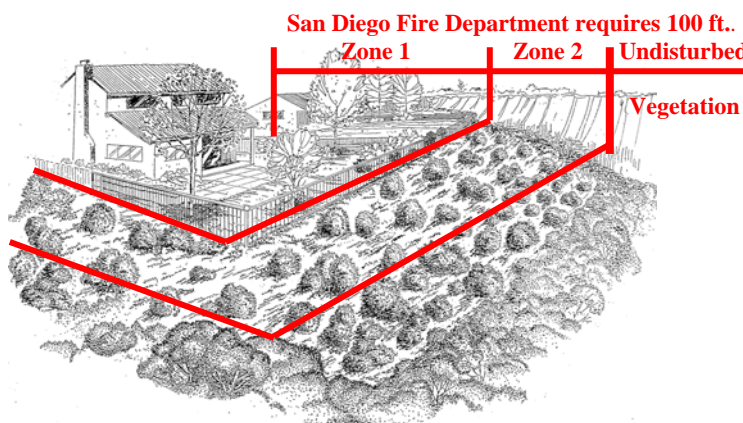
**Step 2: Prune** .....tall vegetation like chaparral by cutting and shaping larger plants into “umbrellas.” This means pruning away the lower branches—about half--of plants over 2 feet high to create umbrella-shaped canopies. If you can, it’s a good idea to prune the lower branches of all the larger plants. This allows you to see and deal with what is growing underneath. Do not prune the tops of plants, just the lower branches. This keeps the plant healthy, and the shade from the plant canopy reduces weed and plant growth underneath. In vegetation that is less tall, like coastal sage scrub, you may not need to do Step 2.



**Step 3: Thin** ....the entire Zone 2 area. This means cutting down no more than 50% of the plants over 2 feet high to a height of 6 inches, and may include some of the plants you pruned in Step Two. Don’t go any lower than 6 inches so the roots remain to control soil erosion. The goal is to create a “mosaic” or more natural look, as shown below, so do your cutting in a “staggered” pattern. Leave uncut plant groupings of 400 square feet—that’s a 20 x 20-foot area, or an area that can be encircled by an 80-foot rope--separated by groupings of plants cut down to 6 inches.



**Before Brush Management**



**After Pruning and Thinning**

**Step 4: Dispose** ....of the cuttings and dead wood by either hauling it to a landfill; or, by chipping/mulching it on-site and spreading it out in the Zone 2 area to a depth of not more than 6 inches.

**Step 5: Prune annually** ....because plants will grow back. You can also “nip it in the bud” by rubbing out the buds on plants in the spring to keep from having to prune and thin as often.

Note: See *Bulletin #2: Use of Goats for Brush Management*, for an alternative way to thin brush.

### Additional Information

- Brush/Weed Abatement; use of goats: City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department (619) 533-4444.
- Property restrictions (easements, permits, deed or title): County Recorder (619) 237-0502.
- Obtaining permits for brush management on private property with restrictions: City of San Diego Development Services Department (619) 446-5000.
- Brush Management on City-owned open space land: City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department, Brush Management Section (619) 525-8607.

\*Authority: *City of San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 14, Article 2, Division 4, Sections 142.0402, 142.04030, 142.0412.*

*Revised 02/10/06 (San Diego Fire-Rescue)*