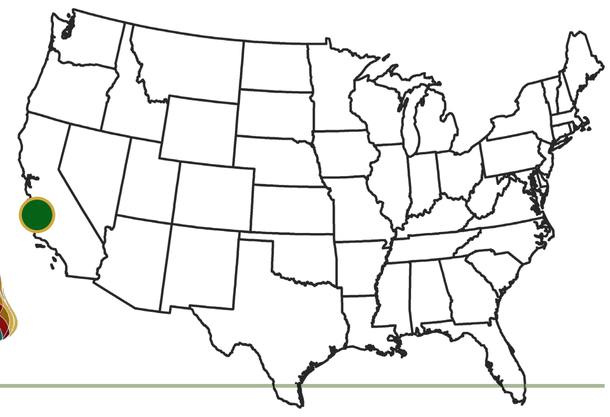
FireScape Monterey

Fire Learning Network

Jeff Kwasny
jkwasny@fs.fed.us
(831) 667-1126

Gordon Johnson
gjohnson@ridgeline.net
(530) 347-1627

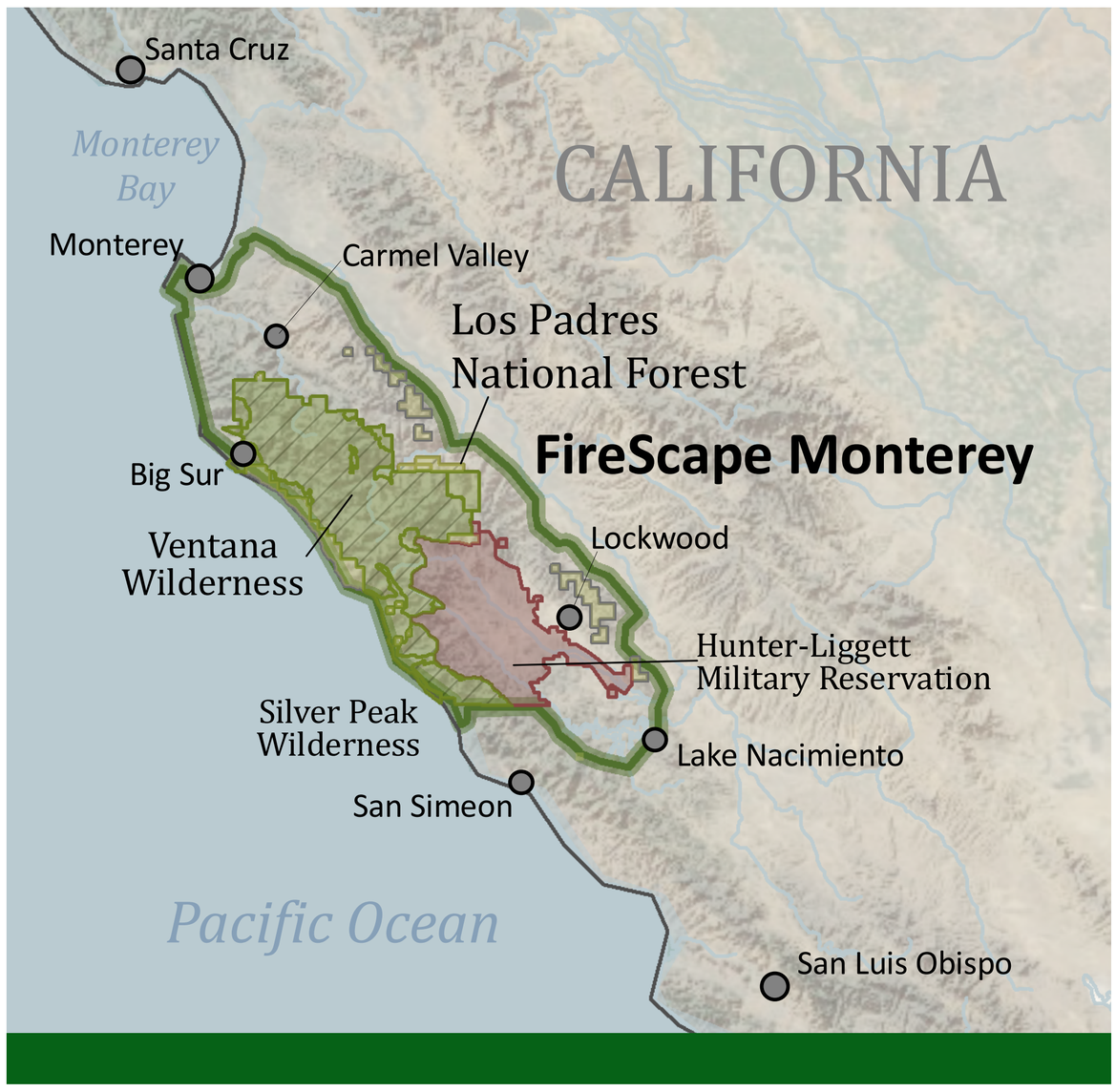


FireScape Monterey completed its Open Standards planning process in 2012, and members emerged from the process re-energized, informed and ready to take action. Since then, the group's core team—made up of property owners and representatives from wilderness groups, federal and state agencies and the University of California—holds regular calls to update one another on the progress of various fire-related projects throughout Monterey County.

A project of particular focus is the U.S. Forest Service Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project, which concept was derived from the Open Standards process. This project is located on the northern portion of the Monterey Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest. It is designed to enhance community protection from wildfire within the wildland-urban interface threat zone, and to prevent unnecessary and inadequate dozer cuts in wilderness. The project includes improving and maintaining strategic historically-used firelines to function as fuel-breaks. In total, the project proposes work on about 24 miles of fuel-breaks, as well as a key 64-acre unit, for a total of 544 acres. A variety of treatment types are proposed, including machine and hand thinning, piling and burning or chipping, and mastication. The notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project was posted on December 28, 2012, and the Forest Service is currently undertaking the NEPA process.

The Fire Safe Council for Monterey has been working with local fire districts to increase local fire suppression capacity to meet community protection needs. Forest Service pass-through grants are being used for work such as on fuel-breaks and road improvement to facilitate suppression crew access.

Other work in this landscape includes research on sudden oak death. Related to this, some partners are working to remove symptomatic bay trees near healthy oak trees along a shared roadway; this will mitigate the effects of the disease, reduce fuels and widen the road for better firefighting vehicle access and improved safety.



Landscape Partners

- Big Sur Land Trust
- Bishop Grading and Forestry Services
- Bureau of Land Management
- Cachagua Fire Prevention District
- CAL FIRE
- California Native Plant Society
- California State Parks
- California State University at Monterey Bay
- California Wilderness Project
- Carmel Highland Fire Protection District
- Coast Property Owners Association
- El Sur Ranch
- Esselen Tribe of Monterey County
- Fire Safe Council for Monterey County
- Galante Vineyards
- Jamesburg-Cachagua Neighbors United
- Los Padres Forest Watch
- Mal Paso Creek Property Association
- Mid-Coast Fire Brigade
- Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
- Monterey County Water Resources Agency
- Monterey FireSafe Council
- Monterey Institute of Research & Astronomy
- Monterey San Benito Range Improvement Association
- USDA Forest Service—Los Padres National Forest
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Resource Conservation District of Monterey County
- Santa Lucia Conservancy
- Sierra Club—Ventana Chapter
- Tassajara Zen Mountain Center
- University of California, Davis—Plant Pathology
- University of California, Santa Cruz—Big Creek Preserve
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. House of Representatives—Office of Sam Farr (Congressional District 20)

Spotlight: Working Together on Sudden Oak Death

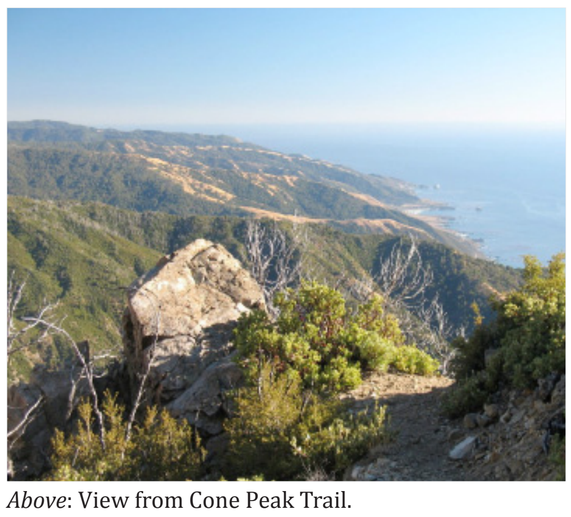
Sudden oak death (SOD) has killed over a million trees in coastal California. The additional fuels across the landscape have firefighters, land managers and citizens concerned about the potential for uncontrollable and devastating fires. Research plots set up by UC Davis in Big Sur before a fire in 2008 showed that depending on the stage of the disease, additional fuels can contribute to more severe wildfires. Surprisingly, some size class of the fire-tolerant and disease-resistant coast redwood trees were twice as likely to die in wildfires that burned in Big Sur areas affected by SOD.

Participants in FireScape Monterey have joined forces to come up with a variety of solutions to prevent SOD from killing more trees, and to manage forests that are heavily impacted by SOD.

- The Forest Service and the University of California Davis have identified three rustic campgrounds on the Monterey Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest where SOD management activities can meet multiple objectives. By reducing fuels in the understory and selectively removing tanoak and bay trees—which are efficient hosts to the pathogen responsible for SOD—campgrounds can be made more SOD tolerant and more fire safe simultaneously.
- Pfieffer Big Sur State Park has removed understory bay trees along part of a trail right in the heart of a popular campground. Since the pathogen responsible for SOD is an introduced species, they are removing understory bay trees under the auspice of invasive species removal and are protecting high value oak trees along a scenic trail.
- Private land owners in the Coastlands neighborhood of Big Sur and a road association have joined forces to clear bay trees along the roadway. This makes ingress and egress safer for residents and firefighters, and at the same time provides their remaining oak trees a fighting chance against the disease.
- The Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve (operated by the University of California Natural Reserve Systen and UC Santa Cruz) has teamed up with SOD researchers at UC Davis and college students to test the efficacy of bay removal on a larger scale. Two management sites have been cleared of understory bay trees in an effort to preserve a habitat disappearing from central California. Students learn about SOD, field work, forest ecology and management; the reserve gets protection of oak trees; and researchers get to test a potentially useful and important land management tool.

Top: Protected oaks in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park.
Bottom: Coastlands neighborhood joint bay removal and road clearance project.

Before and after bay removal at the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve,
All oak photos: Kerri Frangioso/UC Davis



Above: View from Cone Peak Trail.
Photo: Kerri Frangioso, University of California Davis

Right: Partners discuss landscape issues at Botcher's Gap during the field tour at a 2012 workshop.
Photo: Jeff Kwasny/USFS

The Fire Learning Network is supported by Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together (PERFACT), a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information, contact Lynn Decker (ldecker@tnc.org).

