



Scripps-Miramar MAD

Brush Management: What Exactly Is It?

Since I have been writing about brush management, I thought it would be a good idea to describe what it is and how it gets done in city open space. First of all, brush management in city open spaces is controlled by the city's Brush Management Ordinance. It specifies setbacks and clearing or thinning processes that must be followed. The normal setback defined by the city is 100 feet from structures. Now in some of our neighborhoods, our Scripps Ranch Fire Safe Council (SRFSC) obtained permission to increase the setback to 200 feet. This pilot program was based upon a fire fuel analysis done by the SRFSC.

Brush clearance, especially on hillsides, is not really a clearance. Rather, it is a thinning of the brush to reduce the fuel but to leave in place the plants for soil retention. The city's brush management plan calls for a maximum thinning of 50%. Thinning at this level requires more frequent maintenance actions to keep the fuel situation under control.

In Scripps Ranch we have a lot of trees, mostly eucalyptus. Trees are not a normal part of brush management, however, they can be part of the plan if the city arborist determines it appropriate.

We currently have two ways to conduct brush management. The bulk of our efforts have been done via the SRFSC, using individual neighborhood contributions, matched by a combination of federal and state grant funds. The work is performed by a state-sponsored agency. We also have done some clearing using city Landscape Maintenance Assessment District (MAD) crews. This latter task was done primarily to determine the relative cost per acre to accomplish this work with a regular onsite labor force.

In both cases the work plan was reviewed and supervised by a city brush management supervisor. Any tree cutting in our open spaces must be approved by the city, and then is usually left to our tree maintenance contractor to carry out.

As you can imagine, brush management is very hard work and is best left to those who are trained and equipped to do it. If the Scripps-Miramar Ranch MAD does establish a brush management fund, the work carried out will be done in coordination with our SRFSC, as well as the Scripps-Miramar MAD Subcommittee of the Scripps Ranch Planning Group. A plan for our community will be developed that will both target high danger areas and establish a maintenance plan to keep areas that have been cleared at the approved level of clearance.

As always, our MAD actions and finances will be monitored closely by the community to ensure that our funds are being used wisely and that the appropriate level of work is being done. With more than 600 acres of open space and thousands of trees, it will take a significant and sustained effort, as well as adequate resources, to manage this situation.

Marc Sorensen, SRMAD Chair