

THE CHAPARRALIAN

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The Chaparralian #34 Contents



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The Chaparralian is the quarterly journal of the California Chaparral Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is dedicated to the preservation of native shrubland ecosystems and promoting an appreciation for the natural environment through science and education. To join the Institute and receive *The Chaparralian*, please fill out and mail in the slip below or join on our website. We welcome unsolicited submissions to *The Chaparralian*. Please send to rwh@californiachaparral.org or via post to the address below. You can find us on the web at www.californiachaparral.org

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Cover photograph: A giant crushing ball and cage device used to destroy chaparral and other plant communities to modify the "fuel load." In a horrible accident on April 7, 2008, the tractor dragging the device up and down the mountain via an iron cable was pulled over the road's edge, killing driver Ronnie Seay, 64.

Photo upper left: The tractor located about 100 feet upslope from device. Location for both photos: Cleveland National Forest, Trabuco Ranger District.

All photos by Richard Halsey unless indicated otherwise.

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NASCENT THOUGHTS

Whether they emanate from public, media, or government sources, attitudes tend to move in pendulum-like swings. Unfortunately, viewpoints are often pushed to extremes. With drums beating and banners flying, these swings sometimes reach irrational proportions, causing seemingly intelligent people to think and do incredibly stupid things. The imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the McCarthy Era in the 1950s, and the recent display of anti-Muslim and immigrant rhetoric come to mind.

Several decades ago, wildland fire was seen as bad. It was to be suppressed at all costs. Smokey Bear became an American icon. Today, there is nearly universal condemnation of such an approach. Without noting important differences between ecosystems such as forests and shrublands, wildfire is now seen by many as the Holy Grail of ecological revival. Past fire suppression is blamed for nearly every fire, and Smokey Bear is characterized as a quaint failure (at best). Vegetation (fuel) has replaced wildfire as the ultimate evil. The subtleties discovered by scientific research are lost in the hysteria. For example, not all forests are the same. Lodgepole pine forests in Wyoming have a natural fire return interval of 300-400 years while dry ponderosa pine forests in Colorado have naturally small understory fires every 4-36 years. In lodgepole forests, fire suppression has had no impact whatsoever. For ponderosa forests, where lightning saturates the landscape, fire suppression has allowed unnatural accumulations of plant material.

But in the simplistic way many view the world, there is no room for subtleties. All forests are the same, anyone who supports preservation of nature is an environmental whacko, and all Muslims are, well, fill in the blank.

Such attitudes can have significant consequences on government action, which is, of course, only a reflection of the people it serves.

There was a time when we thought that if we

presented the scientific facts and offered a logical way to incorporate those facts into public policy, political leaders would thank us for the information and make informed decisions. Well, OK, so we were naïve.

However, not being a group that gives up easily, we did the only reasonable thing to do. As Victor Yannacone (founder of the Environmental Defense Fund) advised, we went to court (his language was much more colorful).

Suddenly, after our recent win in court (San Diego County was told they need to follow California's Environmental Quality Act), facts started to matter. Although the underlying paradigm that portrays chaparral as an unnatural, invading entity that needs to be chopped up into little pieces remains the mantra of some in the county's planning department, for now, anyway, the natural environment has been given a reprieve.

The lessons learned here are important. First, government decisions are subject to ideological and emotional influences. Facts may win out in the long run, but the desire to win the next election is frequently much more important.

Second, if you want to protect nature, get a good attorney. Otherwise, the "we'll-just-wear-you-down" approach often taken by bureaucracies and well-funded corporations can be quite successful. If you do not have the money and the tenacity to see it through, the truth can be prevented from ever seeing the light of day.

Finally, prepare for the long haul. As John Muir wrote, "The battle we have fought, and are still fighting... is part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong, and we cannot expect to see the end of it."

So we persist, because that is all we can do. This is how millions of acres of wilderness have been preserved, and how the chaparral will be finally protected for the remarkable natural values it provides to us all.



Don't Call It Brush!

A Short History of Attitudes About the Chaparral

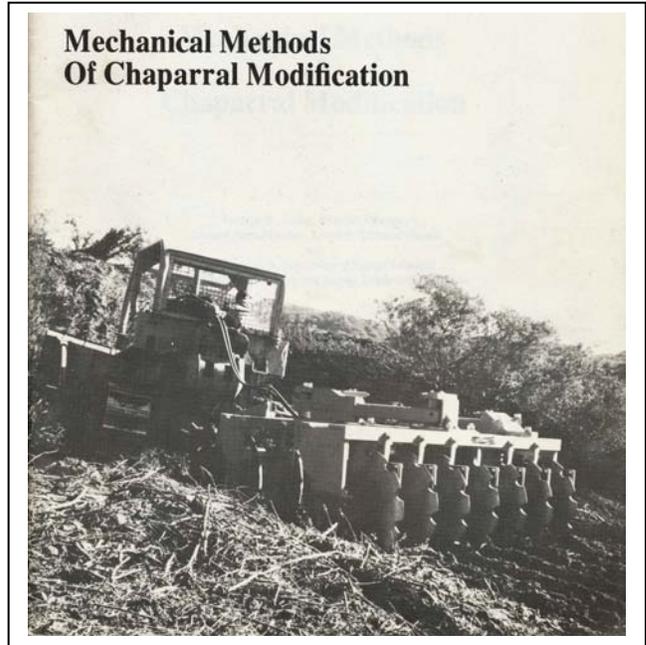
By Richard W. Halsey

My intent, and my family's hope, when we went to the bookstore this past Father's Day was to buy a fun, summertime read to take my mind off work. However, there it was, tempting me from the stacks: the recent edition of a popular hiking guide. With anticipation, I opened to the section on Agua Tibia, a beautiful chaparral-covered Wilderness in the Cleveland National Forest. I searched for the erroneous paragraph on fire suppression that had been in earlier editions. It said that the beautiful, old-growth manzanita and red shanks chaparral that had grown there before a fire in 1989 was unnatural. If it had not been for fire suppression, the paragraph continued to claim, the natural fire return interval of every decade or two would have prevented such a mature stand of chaparral from ever developing in the first place. Unfortunately, the new edition kept the incorrect perspective.

What made this especially frustrating was that I had contacted the author several times in the past and alerted him to the mistake.

Will it ever end?

Despite dedicated efforts by many in the conservation and scientific communities to help the public, government agencies, and political leaders understand that old-growth chaparral is a beautiful natural resource and that California's native shrublands provide important watershed, biodiversity, and cultural values, tragic misunderstandings persist. Chaparral is frequently considered not only worthless, but an "evil menace" due to its inherent flammability. Hence, many advocate that shrublands be systematically reduced or eliminated through mechanical clearance or prescribed burning. Dense stands of chaparral are falsely seen as "unnatural" overgrowth in need of immediate



Cover of a USFS booklet on how to modify and eliminate chaparral. Agriculture Handbook #487. April 1976.

mitigation. Old-growth stands of manzanita and chamise that have not burned for many decades are viewed only as dangerous concentrations of fuel rather than the increasingly rare plant communities they represent. Changing such perspectives has been incredibly difficult and frustrating for those of us who understand not only the importance of conserving California's native plant communities, but also the benefits that come from such action.

Why has the task proven to be so challenging? While science and logic can be effective when forming new opinions or original public policy, they are often ignored or dismissed when favored paradigms control the conversation.

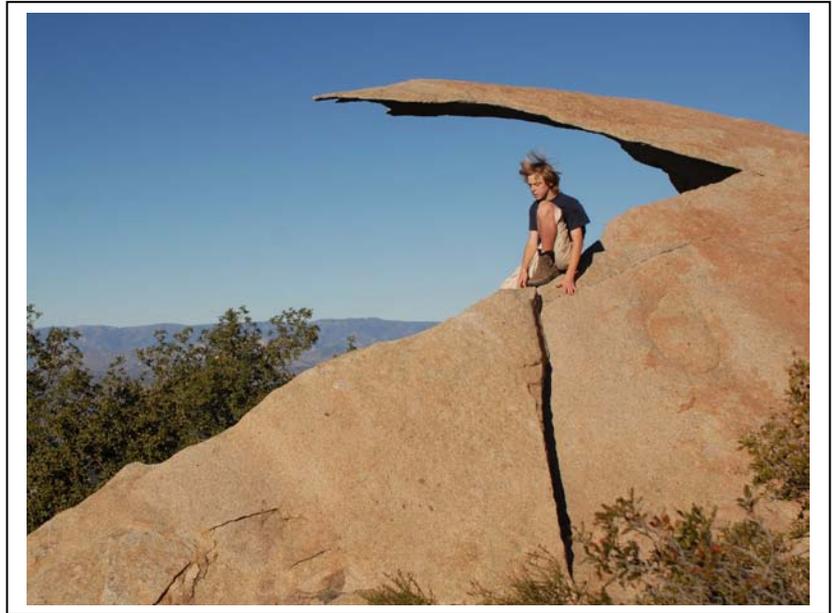
(Attitudes continued on page 7)

Poetry of a Kindred Spirit

By Nancy Jordan

Exploring Enchantment

She heard him say
 That the purpose of art
 Is to enchant the human mind
 And the human heart
 Into a sense
 Of their true kingdom,
 Of their true magnificence.
 It's all she's ever wanted,
 For herself and everyone else.
 But how, but how?
 Something deep inside
 Tells her that
 Only enchantment
 Will insure the flowering of the
 planet,
 And everything upon it.
 Only then,
 Will the new and true connections
 Be realized.
 And together we will
 Plunge into a sea of Light
 In the world of mysteries.
 And what we were
 Will be forgot
 As we witness
 All things made new.



A Morning

Could it be
 That the single,
 Greatest justification
 For hope,
 For trust,
 Is that every night
 Is followed
 By a morning?

THE SPIDER AND THE WASP: Look Who's Coming for Dinner

By Bill Howell

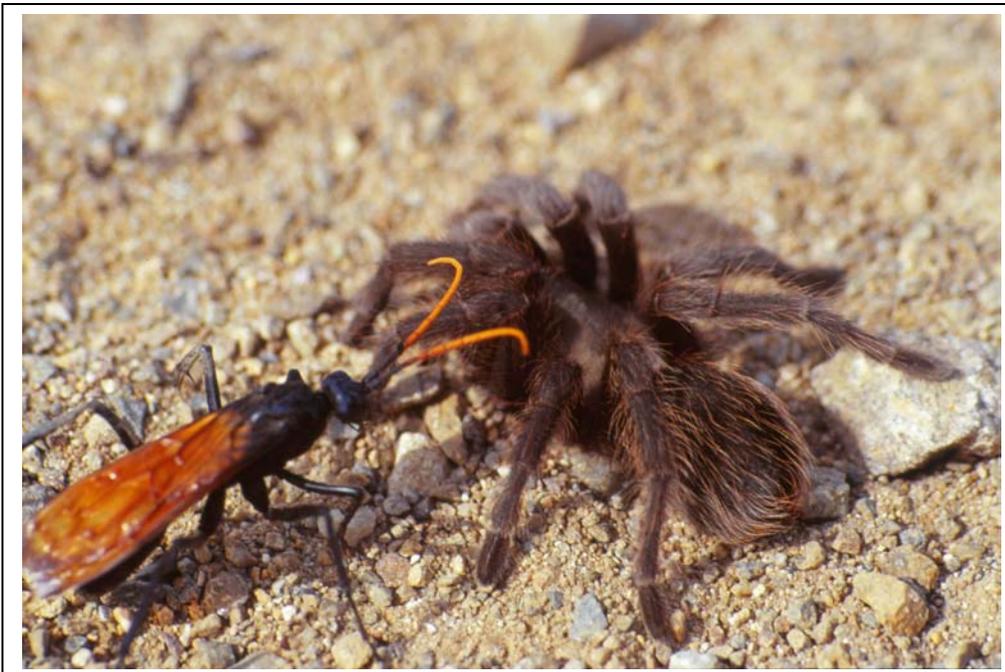
Big spiders roam the chaparral — they're four inches across. They are usually male tarantulas out for a stroll, looking for females. The ladies may live more than 20 years; the males live less than 10. Once a young bachelor locates his true love, he is doomed. A male finds a partner, mates once, and dies — if he's lucky. The mini-beast may die sooner from a fate worse — if he's unlucky. Because also roaming the shrublands are the *hawks*.

Tarantula hawks (more accurately, pepsis wasps) have orange-red wings, iridescent blue-black bodies, and an attitude. The hawks are mothers-to-be looking for a fight — with a spider. The fathers which flit around sipping on flowers, are smaller, stingerless, and have a more docile nature. The females, feminist flying machines two inches from jaw to stinger with a three inch wing span, will search out an amorous arachnid and flash a sign. The spider, nearsighted and clumsy, assumes a pugilistic posture and panics. Not arachnophobic,

the agile wasp, floats like a butterfly, stings like a bee, and in short order, the hairy tarantula is stunned and out of the gene pool. The paralyzed prize is now invited for dinner.

Mother wasp drags “sleeping beauty” to a den in the dirt and lays an egg — on the guest. Shortly, a new, tiny larva feasts on eight dazed drumsticks while carefully excluding the vital organs — they're for dessert. The idea is to keep the meal fresh as long as possible. Just prior to the last stage, the important parts are consumed by the no-longer-tiny larva, and the banquet dies in its sleep — with an empty heart. After a short pause in the pupal stage, the emerging wasp, the same size as mom, flies off looking for nectar and a mate to continue this primordial pepsis tradition. Remember, there are no “baby” wasps; they all emerge as full-grown adults.

On your next trek through the foothills, look for them both. Flame red wings on steely blue bodies the size of your thumb, are easy to spot on their flying mission without mercy. And the largest octopeds in California are also hard to miss as they look for a little action along the dry trails of the chaparral. You now know what to look for, and you also know who is looking for whom and for what! Happy trails.



A pepsis wasp attacking a tarantula. Photo by Bill Howell.

Attitudes (from page 4)

These paradigms can be a product of prior learning, ideology, or what Eckhart Tolle has so eloquently identified as the ego's "pain-body:" old but still influential emotions shaped by unresolved, painful experiences. When these paradigms are challenged, disagreements can be seen as personal attacks because believers become emotionally and/or professionally committed to the paradigm's acceptance.

When it comes to convincing others of the value of any native plant community, the tendency for some to see humans as separate from nature adds to the difficulty, especially when nature is seen as the source of fires that threaten lives and property. "Nature" is the problem, not us. Consequently, nature becomes the "other." Blaming an entity beyond ourselves for a particular problem has been a common strategy used by demagogues throughout history to deflect attention away from the real issues. Diane Conklin, a community activist in San Diego County, touched on the consequences of such behavior during a public hearing on the county's proposed massive native vegetation treatment program in 2009. She testified, "Don't drag the suburban sprawl out into the chaparral and say, 'Oh my God, we have fuel out here!'"

Still, despite the frustrations and setbacks, we have seen a significant amount of progress in changing public attitudes about native shrublands. We are beginning to hear language we have emphasized over the past seven years in fire safety literature (reduce fire risk from the house out rather than from the wildland in), newspaper editorials (too many fires, no chaparral), and in conversations with others, "If they mow down the chaparral, it will just be replaced by flammable weeds."

Of course winning lawsuits to help convince local governments to follow state environmental laws has certainly helped.

So, when did all this anti-chaparral chatter start, anyway? Is our love for the chaparral a fleeting

passion or is it part of a long tradition?

"Glorious Flower-beds"

Although it may come as a surprise to many, efforts to enlighten the public about the value of chaparral are nearly as old as the desire to replace it with pasture for livestock.

John Muir, California's most famous conservationist, expressed a poignant reflection of the chaparral's personality and his love of nature, no matter how challenging it can be, while exploring Southern California's San Gabriel Mountains in 1877. He wrote, "... from first to last during three days spent in this excursion, I had to contend with the richest, most self-possessed and uncompromising chaparral I have ever enjoyed since first my mountaineering began." Referring to the lower elevations of Mt. Shasta in northern California, Muir described a "dense growth of chaparral from three to six or eight feet high, composed chiefly of manzanita, cherry, chincapin, and several species of ceanothus, called deerbrush by the hunters, forming, when in full bloom, one



Red shanks and chamise chaparral near Alpine, California.

of the most glorious flower-beds conceivable.”

As a quick primer for any new Chaparralian reading this, chaparral covers nearly 10 million acres of California and defines the state like no other plant community. Characterized by drought-hardy, woody shrubs, chaparral typically creates a dense thicket of vegetation that decorates many of the hills and lower elevation mountain slopes surrounding urban centers, especially in Southern California. Shaped by a Mediterranean-type climate with hot dry summers, and mild, wet winters, chaparral is extremely sensitive to alterations in natural fire regimes. If fires occur too frequently, less than 15 to 20 years apart, or during the moist season (winter and spring), chaparral can be extirpated and replaced by weedy, nonnative grasslands. In fact, one of the primary reasons for the establishment of the four National Forests in Southern California (the Cleveland, San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres) was to protect chaparral from frequent fires, most of which were caused by human activity as they are today.

One of the most interesting descriptions of an individual's growing appreciation for the chaparral comes from Francis M. Fultz's 1927 book, *The Elfin Forest*. He wrote, “The Chaparral is very dear to me now, but when I first ‘hit the trail’ that led me into it, it did not strike me at all favorably. And everything about it was so new and strange that I almost felt as if I were in another world. Of the ‘brush’ of which it was composed, there was scarcely a familiar form, and it was all so harsh and unyielding that it aroused a certain feeling of hostility within me. I knew, however, that the feeling was unjust, for I was fully aware the Chaparral was a forest-cover designed by Nature as the best possible means for the conservation of the land. I knew, too, the proper thing for me to do was to down the unfriendly feeling and make an honest effort to get acquainted.”

The foreword of Fultz's book, written by George Clements, who worked for the Los

Angeles Chamber of Commerce, added further encouragement to explore chaparral-covered hills. He wrote, “To you who woo the natural beauty of our southland, who love to wander over mountain, hill, valley and desert, this little work, like the lens in the hand of the biologist – will give you the key to those exquisite lovelinesses which are only the attribute of tiny things. Southern California's brush-clad hills become a mine of beauty, snowflakes under glass.”

In 1939, Lester Rowntree, one of California's pioneer botanists, explored the state's native plant communities with a burro named Skimpy or by car with a single seat (the others she had “ousted to make room for my dunnage and for spreading my sleeping bag on stormy nights”). She made it clear that “seasoned Californians love the chaparral at all times of the year – when it is brown and rusty in late summer, as well as when the winter rains have brought out the greens of the different foliage.”

Although Rowntree warned that chaparral “is not a place for a lady in skirts and silk stockings,” it was “like a symphony” where each “stand has a dominant species which like a main theme shows powerfully here and there among the minor ones.” And besides the “endless interesting plant data to be collected,”



Ceanothus chaparral in bloom along CA State Hwy 79, west of Santa Ysabel, San Diego County.

she noted that “there will be other things besides the growth of shrubs to amuse you. All day long you will have the alluring companionship and conversation of wren tits.”

Echoing Fultz’s perspective that once one takes time to appreciate the chaparral, it becomes a wonderful destination to explore, Winfield “Bud” Head wrote in his now 1972 classic, *The California Chaparral, an Elfin Forest*, “After a day or weekend in the Elfin Forest, most individuals admit that there is a fascination here. Perhaps not as glaringly apparent as in other forests. In many cases, it was necessary to point out certain sights to them. Within a short time, the newcomers to this country were asking questions. Then I knew I had them hooked.”

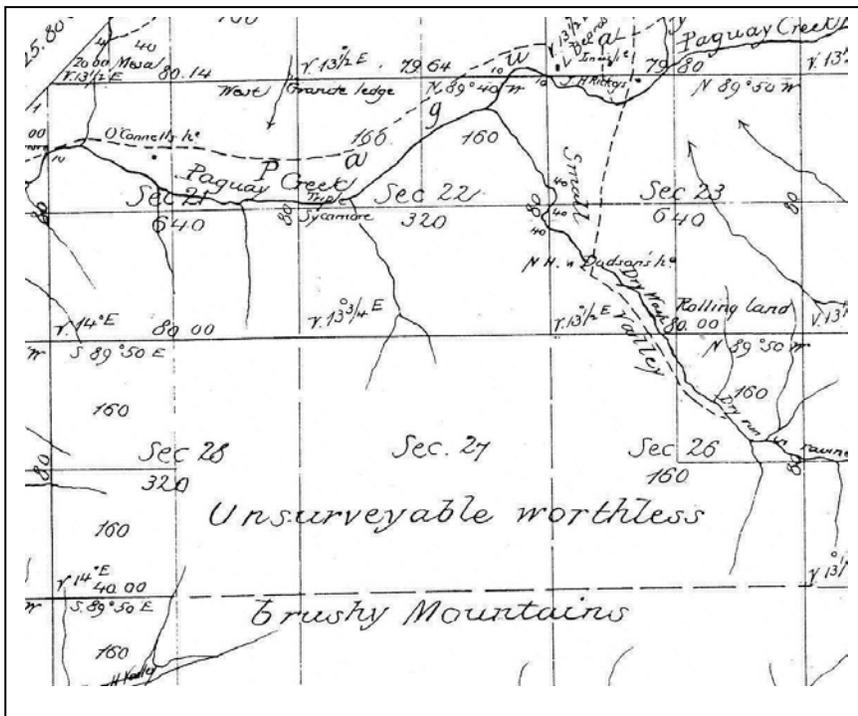
Recognizing that chaparral is a distinct entity, as opposed to being a nondescript jumble of plants between grasslands and higher elevation forests, is an essential component of any effort to protect it. These early writers certainly did their best to help achieve this goal. However, recognition and appreciation do not necessarily occur together. Economic desires and fear are powerful forces that can influence how one perceives something in the environment. When

it comes to chaparral, both forces have led to significant amounts of animosity toward the ecosystem.

The Evil Menace

The “shrublands-are-worthless-and-dangerous” paradigm in California has been developing for more than a century. So the desire to get rid of them is nothing new. Early settlers saw chaparral as having little if any economic value. This is why they continuously tried to “clear the brush” by burning. Ranchers used fire to expand rangelands, prospectors burned areas they intended to explore, and hunters would often start fires to drive out game. In an 1879 map drawn by California’s Survey General’s Office of the northern part of what was to become San Diego County, highland areas above creeks and valleys were labeled “Unsurveyable worthless brushy Mountains.”

Seeing chaparral as only a threat, the author of the *Daily San Diegan* newspaper article published after the huge Southern California fires of 1889 wrote, “The cause of the spreading fires is the dry brush which is allowed to remain on the unoccupied lands, and so long will San Diego be menaced by these running fires. The



Chaparral-covered landscape referred to as “Unsurveyable worthless brushy Mountains.” The map, drawn September, 1879, shows the area just south of old Rancho de los Peñasquitos in San Diego County. Paguay Creek is Poway Creek which flows through Peñasquitos Canyon. From *Rancho de Los Peñasquitos - On the Road to Yuma* by Mary Ward, 1984.

menace should be removed by the removal of the brush. It is unsightly and is dangerous.”

How to manage these “brushlands” has been a topic of discussion and countless symposiums. Until quite recently, the ultimate goal of this management has been to eliminate chaparral and either replace it with grassland as forage for livestock or to convert it to a forest.

However, by the 1980s, likely due to California’s changing demographics and the decline of ranching, negative attitudes toward chaparral began to wane. In 1982, Ralph C. Cisco, the Supervisor of the Cleveland National Forest, presented a paper at a symposium in San Diego acknowledging that management of the so-called “brushlands” was in the past “oversimplified because the vegetation was seen as being very

uniform and, more or less, worthless.” But now, he continued, “we have begun to recognize the diversity that actually exists in these vegetation types,” and that “management schemes for these various chaparral types should reflect their diverse characteristics and requirements.”

Richard Vogl, an ecologist who has written extensively about native California ecosystems, wrote in 1981 that, “In recent years there has been talk among even the hard-core brush fighters of ‘learning to live’ with chaparral. One does not know if this is an admission of defeat or the acquisition of ecological wisdom.” But he added, “The brush fight will continue to arise in various forms unless we make efforts to fully understand chaparral ecosystems... If we think that chaparral presents problems and appears worthless, we have not thought ahead to the



Failed tree farming. This area was cleared of chaparral and graded to establish an artificial pine tree plantation. It was never completed. Note tree planting terraces on type-converted hill in background. Photo taken in the Trabuco Ranger District, Cleveland National Forest.



Huge grinding machine used to chew up or “masticate” chaparral into small wood chips. Photo taken in the Trabuco Ranger District, Cleveland National Forest, by Joel Robinson.

degraded alternatives that would replace chaparral if we succeeded in eliminating it. When man wars against nature, man wars against himself.”

Eerily foreshadowing the current hostility toward chaparral, Vogl warned that, “We must also be aware of California’s history of a ‘brush fighter’s’ mentality and that such feelings toward ‘brush’ still exist and might again prevail.” With the advent of a significant number of large shrubland wildfires in California since 2003, the “brush fighter’s” mentality has certainly found renewed energy.

Fuel management has now become a major

focus of federal and state fire agencies as they struggle with ways to reduce fire risk. Consequently, a significant amount of attention has been placed on removing chaparral in wildland areas, either by using prescribed burning, goats, or mastication. For example, the 2005 fire management plan for Tulare County has declared that in order to attain the goal of minimizing the threat of fire, “*we must reduce the amount of brush covered lands.*”

A rather extreme example of anti-chaparral rhetoric comes from Monterey County’s 2010 Community Wildfire Protection Plan when it equated clearing chaparral to a constitutional right. It stated, “State laws should acknowledge

that all Californians have fundamental inalienable rights, pursuant to Article 1, Section 1 of the California Constitution, to defend life, protect property, and pursue and obtain safety, and that hazardous overgrowth assaults each of these rights if individuals are not free to address it.”

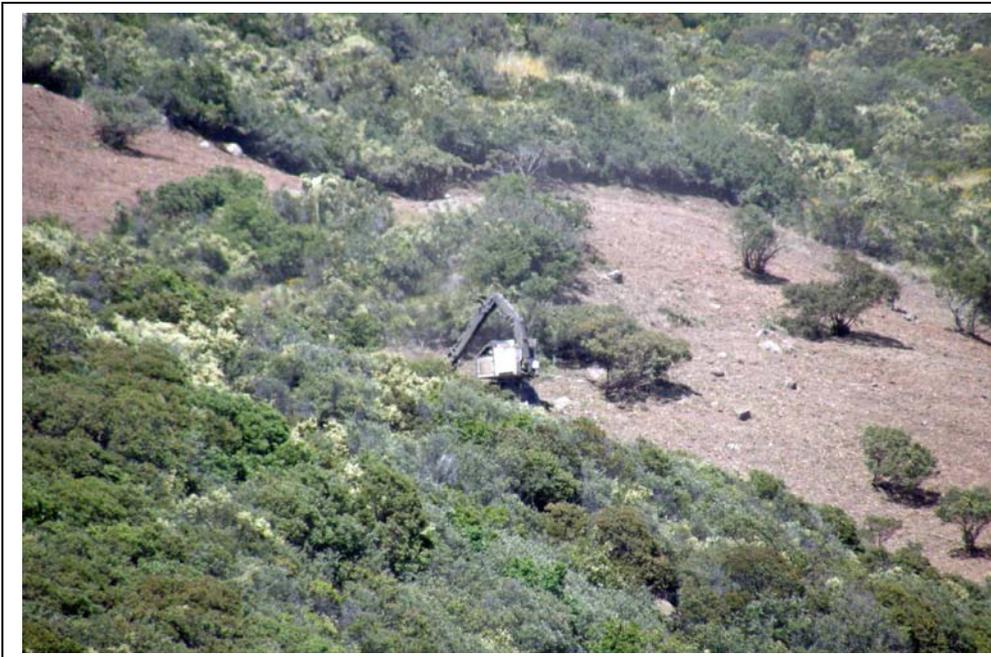
Knowing Means Understanding

Although there will likely always be individuals who are terminally anti-chaparral, we continue to believe that once the ecosystem’s beauty and importance are revealed and misconceptions corrected, chaparral will become as valued as other, more popular native plant communities.

Key to our effort to protect and preserve the chaparral is helping others learn how to recognize it and become familiar with the plants and animals that live there. Forests and grasslands are seen as important because people have learned to recognize them. As Chaparralians, we must endeavor to share our knowledge to allow others to do the same for the chaparral. The preservation of California’s remarkable biodiversity depends on it.

“People don’t describe what they see, they see what they can describe.”

- James Flaherty



Above: Old-growth chaparral destroyed by a mechanical “masticator” like the one shown on page 11. Federal grants to local Fire Safe Councils to conduct “fuel treatments” encourage such unnecessary habitat damage. Photo taken near the community of Painted Cave, Santa Barbara next to the Los Padres National Forest.

Left: The destruction continues. This photo was taken this past June in the same area as above. Photo by Brain Trautwein, Environmental Defense Center.

UNFOLDINGS

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.

-Anne Lamott

God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand tempests and floods. But he cannot save them from fools.

-John Muir

I am I plus my surroundings, and if I do not preserve the latter, I do not preserve myself.

José Ortega y Gasset

An environmental setting developed over millions of years must be considered to have some merit. Anything so complicated as a planet, inhabited by more than a million and a half species of plants and animals, all of them living together in a more or less balanced equilibrium in which they continually use and reuse the same molecules of the soil and air, cannot be improved by aimless and uninformed tinkering.

-E.F. Schumacher

Usually, terrible things done with the excuse that progress requires them are not really progress at all, but just terrible things.

-Russell Baker

Truth has a power of its own...A poem can inspire a movement. A Pamphlet can spark a revolution. Civil disobedience can arouse people and provoke us to think.

-Howard Zinn

Don't do nothing because you can't do everything. Do something. Anything.

-Colleen Patrick-Goudreau

Empires fall when people serve the regulations instead of the regulations servicing the people and when the bureaucracy no longer questions its purpose.

-Jim Hart

I put a dollar in a change machine. Nothing happened.

-George Carlin

