

**VILLAGE OF ANGEL FIRE**  
**Wildfire Protection Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**July 14, 2014 at Village Hall**

**I. Call to Order**

Chairman Sprott called meeting to order at 1:06 PM.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Sprott called for Pledge of Allegiance

**III. Roll Call**

Committee members present were Chairman Sprott, Dan Rakes, Dave Hartson, Arnie Friedt, and Mike Clemmons. Secretary Jones and John Goodson were excused. A quorum was present. Council Liaison Colenda was excused.

Committee Staff Advisors Mitchell, Bertges, and Smith were present.

Members of Public present: Pat McCarty, Sean Simonsen, James Marlin, Davis Scharff, Gabriel Weinstein, and Bob Lagasse.

**IV. Approval of Agenda**

Rakes made the motion to approve the revised agenda as published, Friedt seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**V. Approval of Minutes**

Two corrections were noted for section 1E. Rakes made the motion to approve the corrected Minutes, Friedt seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

**VI. Business**

**A. Old Business**

**1. Approve Recommendation for Action by Council on Proposed Ordinance 9-7-13**

Chairman Sprott recognized Pat McCarty who asked to provide information he had found researching forest thinning. McCarty provided summary of information that suggested thinning forests could increase wildfire hazard. Friedt agreed to review McCarty's information. Clemmons suggested delaying action on draft until July 21 committee meeting so that input from Open House and Friedt's review could be considered by Committee. Mitchell said that Staff had completed review of the draft ordinance and that he would present the draft to Council at its July 22 Work Session. Hartson made motion to table approval of recommendation for action by Council on the proposed Ordinance 9-7-13 until Committee meeting on July 21 and Rakes seconded. Motion passed 4-0 with Rakes - Aye, Hartson - Aye, Friedt - Aye, and Clemmons - Aye.

**2. Report on Focus Group Meetings with Relators and Builders**

Mitchell and Sprott reported the Realtor meeting was well attended. Mitchell summarized proposal and implementation plan for realtors. There were many questions and attendees expressed appreciation for the information and were encouraged to stay involved in the process.

**3. Preparation for Public Open House**

Set up times and assignments were discussed.

**4. Chronicle Special Section Update & Status**

Deadline is August 4 to have articles to Sprott and Jones.

**B. New Business**

**1. Recommendation for Committee Members by Mayor**

Sprott explained practice of Village to avoid having staff appointed as voting members of committees. The Wildfire Protection Committee is an advisory group to the Mayor, Council, and Staff appointed by the Mayor. The Mayor formally appointed members of the Wildfire Protection Committee on July 10 (Letter Attached).

**2. Wildfire Protection Program Budget**

Mitchell summarized the Wildfire Protection Fund and program budget.

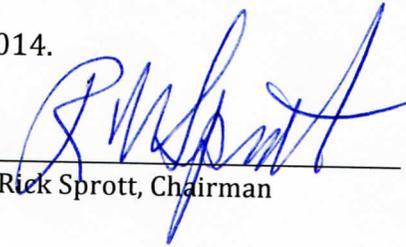
**VII. Questions from Audience Members**

McCarty said he would provide his research references and letter to Council and Committee.

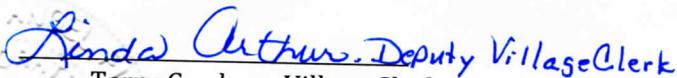
Agenda may be picked up at the village hall 3388 Mountain View Blvd., Angel Fire, NM 87710. Agenda may also be viewed at our website: [angelfirenm.gov](http://angelfirenm.gov). If you are an individual who is in need of any auxiliary aid or service to attend the meeting, please contact the Village Clerk's office 48 hours prior to the meeting. Marlin stated his appreciation for better understanding the treat of structures in stating wildland fires in the Village and thanked the Committee for working in a positive spirit.

Passed, Approved and Adopted on this 21<sup>th</sup> day of July 2014.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Transcribed by Rick Sprött in Scott Jones' absence

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Rick Sprött, Chairman

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Terry Cordova, Village Clerk



# Village of Angel Fire

P.O. Box 610  
ANGEL FIRE, NEW MEXICO 87710  
(505) 377-3232 FAX (505) 377-3280



July 10, 2014

RE: Wildfire Protection Committee and Member Appointment

I hereby establish the Wildfire Protection Committee to assist the Mayor, Council, and Staff:

1. Develop policy and ordinances for wildfire protection,
2. Develop implementation plans for the Wildfire Protection Program, and
3. Provide education and outreach for the Wildfire Protection Program.

The following individuals are appointed as voting members of the Committee:

1. Rick Sprott, Chairman
2. Scott Jones, Secretary
3. Mike Clemmons
4. Arnie Friedt
5. John Goodson
6. David Hartson
7. Dan Rakes

Councilor Brinn Colenda is appointed as the Council Liaison to the Committee.

The following individuals are appointed as staff advisors of the Committee:

1. Jay Mitchell
2. Andy Bertges
3. Burl Smith
4. Brian Bredthauer

Barbara Cottam  
Mayor

July 14, 2014

I was asked by neighbors to man a table at the Village Wildfire Open House Friday July 11<sup>th</sup> and answer questions about protecting your homes from wildfire. I believe I was asked because our home and lot may be a classic example of what I've learned is referred to as "Defensible Space" in fire prevention terms. We purchased our lot on Vail Loop 35 years ago, in part, because it had fire access roads on all four sides. When we built in 2000 we cleared most of the thick conifers and have for the past 14 years aggressively transplanted and encouraged the growth of Aspen to act as a fire break.

I was not familiar with the Village's formal Wildfire Plan so I went online to inform myself. I found a pdf copy of the plan on the Village's website. In reviewing the plan, I found recommendations of revisions to Village code 9-7-13. I found the relevant code on [angelfirenm.gov](http://angelfirenm.gov) and saw that it required many good wildfire prevention measures for property owners, among them the "Defensible Space" concept for properties with homes, and thinning conifers to a spacing of 16' on undeveloped property.

I went online to research and educate myself on "Defensible Space" and found it to be widely accepted in most New Mexico and Colorado communities and considered to be effective as wildfire protection.

However, online searches for "thinning" and "canopy reduction" as protection against wildfire returned a significant number of expert opinion and evidence stating that thinning actually resulted in a "risk of catastrophic wildfire that has been dramatically increased."

I quickly found numerous references supporting the above opinion:

"For example, the recently released Sierra Nevada Forest Plan states that reduction of forest canopy cover actually causes more severe fires by increasing the velocity of "mid-flame winds." Further, the Fire and Fuels section of the Sierra Plan acknowledges that "in areas where the larger trees have been removed, stand replacing fires are more likely to occur." This same section, for the purposes of fire and fuels management, defines "large trees" as those over 12 inches in diameter."

"There have been few empirical studies looking at the effectiveness of thinning as a treatment for reducing wildfire hazard (Frost 1999). The studies that have been conducted have reported highly variable results. Some studies indicate that thinning treatments designed to reduce fire risk actually increase the risk and severity of the fires (Huff, et al. 1995, van Wegendonk 1996, Weatherspoon 1996). Although these treatments may reduce the flammable biomass in the area, they also lead to drier forests and higher winds (Countryman 1955, Agee 1997). Additionally, silvicultural treatments, even when conducted carefully, can lead to the following adverse conditions (excerpted from Frost 1999)"

"But when you remove that much canopy shade small trees and brush sprout and grow prolifically. Within 5 years or so the risk of catastrophic wildfire has dramatically increased. Also, immediately after logging the open canopy increases sunlight and wind on the forest floor. Forest fuels dry sooner and this also increases fire risk."

"The evidence suggests that wildland fuel reduction for reducing home losses may be inefficient and ineffective: inefficient because wildland fuel reduction for several 100 feet or more around homes is greater than necessary for reducing ignitions from flames; ineffective because it does not sufficiently reduce firebrand ignitions."

The last two above references were by Jack Cohen, cited by the writers of Angel Fire's Wildfire Protection Plan as one of the nation's foremost experts on wildfire. The Wildfire Protection Plan is posted on the Village website.

After finding evidence so easily suggesting thinning, to the extent of canopy reduction, may cause dramatic increase in catastrophic wildfires, I searched for communities in New Mexico and Colorado who had implemented thinning programs. I only found two: Ruidoso, NM and Breckinridge, CO.

Breckenridge rescinded thinning regulations soon after codifying them. I respectfully petition the Mayor and Council to contact Breckenridge town administrators to learn why they rescinded thinning regulations. I further petition Mayor and Council to review Breckenridge's wildfire mitigation policies and perhaps model Angel Fire's after theirs.

Ruidoso codified an aggressive thinning program in 2002. It has been reported that they spent 4.3 million dollars on their thinning effort. In 2012 the "Little Bear" fire destroyed more homes and property than in Ruidoso's entire 150 year history. I suggest this is very compelling evidence that Jack Cohen is accurate when he says significant canopy reduction dramatically increases the risk of catastrophic wildfire!

"Crown Fires" is a, relatively new, wildfire protection community buzz word I hear used very often when speaking with anyone involved with the Village's Wildfire Protection planning. Crown Fire is that component of a wildfire that includes the standing tree branches as opposed to underbrush and ground cover. I submit that advisors to Council have been unduly focused on "Crown Fire" mitigation, hence the recommendation on Conifer spacing, at the expense of overall wildfire mitigation and thus may have inadvertently ill-advised village officials.

I respectfully submit my findings in the hope that we do not introduce a catastrophic wildfire risk that doesn't currently exist.

Sincerely,

Pat McCarty  
31 Vail Loop  
575-377-2372

References:

[http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/forestrypilot/files/JMP\\_attachment.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/forestrypilot/files/JMP_attachment.pdf)  
[http://www.pacificbio.org/initiatives/fire/fire\\_ecology.html](http://www.pacificbio.org/initiatives/fire/fire_ecology.html)  
<http://www.johnmuirproject.org/pdf/Cohen-Fire-Threat-to-Homes-PSW-GTR-173.pdf>  
<http://www.johnmuirproject.org/>  
<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/wildfire/ruidoso/reduction.html>  
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