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Fire Clearance



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* Fire clearance in Southern California indeed raises difficult issues ("Couple's Fire Hazard Catch-22," April 24). For every new house that is constructed in the Santa Monica Mountains, three acres of habitat are destroyed by fire clearance. We are losing our birds, butterflies and plants, lot by lot. Fire clearance laws even trump property rights. A private lot can be forcibly and legally denuded by neighbors conducting fire clearance.

Thank goodness our public lands thus far have been able to resist this incursion. Asking for fire clearance on public land is akin to demanding that a sea wall be constructed on a public beach to reduce flood insurance costs for an adjacent homeowner. Living next to a park may have its costs, but there are benefits, too: privacy, beauty and increased property values, to name a few.

TRAVIS LONGCORE
Urban Wildlands Group
Los Angeles

* My heart really bleeds for the Decters, caught up in a "Catch-22" because their fire insurance rates are increased. The tragedy of it all! All they wanted was nature in their own backyard (at taxpayer expense), no noisy neighbors to their rear (kept out by public law) and no greedy developers lusting for their scenic view. How shameful that now they are asked to pay a premium for the privilege through higher insurance rates. What is the world coming to?

MARTIN RUBIN
Northridge

* It is ironic at best and incredible, in fact, that of all people to be "penalized" for the administration of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area are Betty and Jerry Decter. Apparently the National Park Service refuses to recognize that neither the ecology of the Santa Monica Mountains nor the public's visual quality will be harmed by clearing the brush on the parkland surrounding their Franklin Canyon home.

Betty and Jerry did as much as any two people to bring the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area into existence. Among the group of us working to change the law and public policy of the early 1970s to bring about this result, the Decters stood out within a dozen folks without whose efforts there would have been no success.

Achieving preservation in the context of the mountains' unique land-use patterns requires a sensitive balancing of public and private rights. Brush clearance to reduce fire danger does not require brush removal, only the annual trimming of natural vegetation.

ANTONIO ROSSMANN
Professor, School of Law
UC Berkeley

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