

What Makes One Side of a Highway More Flammable Than the Other?

HVCC agrees to support the Lucerne Valley-Johnson Valley MAC in the Request to Adjust the SRA Boundary

Who cared where the line was drawn to establish a boundary between the areas protected by the County Fire Department and CalFire? No one, until 2011 when it was used to hit property owners in the CalFire State Responsibility Area (SRA) with a \$150 “fee for benefits” on each parcel with a habitable structure...even though it’s County Fire which responds to structure fires.

The fight in the courts continues against this fee as an illegal tax, but everyone in Flamingo Heights and most of Johnson Valley still gets the bill every year.

When then-president Jim Harvey brought this to the HVCC, the Council immediately launched a protest against this SRA Fire Tax. It is like a parcel tax; you pay whether you are a millionaire or below the poverty line on a fixed income.

The whole mandate revealed itself as a scam when it was stated to be for fire prevention, yet the SRA borderline is Hwy 247. Common sense and research clearly showed there is no difference in wildfire hazards on either side of the road; nothing found recently contradicts that. CalFire resource assessment and maps showed:

- San Bernardino County is *not* on the list of Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.
- The Surface Fuels map page showed high thick grass like oat grass, common in higher elevations but *not* near Hwy 247.

- Fire Threat Map: Moderate (the lowest grading)
- Fire Hazard Severity Zones Map: Once you get down out of the mountains, we did not even rate a “moderate.”
- Fire Perimeters map of fire history since 1950, generally 300-acre minimum for CDF fires and 10-acre minimum for USFS fires, but many smaller fires as well: in the SRA's subject to tax, NO FIRES were shown

The vegetation coverage in our desert does not support the wildfires that create so much havoc at higher elevations with more rainfall, as Commander Dave Benfield assured us in 2011. Not to say that such a thing could not happen, but the type of fuel and the far between structures makes it unlikely. The Lucerne Valley-Johnson Valley Municipal Advisory Council voted to recommend that the County Supervisors support the effort to move the SRA Boundary upslope to the wildlands at higher risk from wildfires.

The HVCC is taking this issue to our representatives in the State Assembly and Senate, as well as to the County Board of Supervisors.

County Fire responds to structure fires in Flamingo Heights and Johnson Valley; they offer fire prevention services and burn permits as well. Moving the boundary makes no real difference – except to victims of the fire tax.



County Supervisor James Ramos recently asked for a statement of the advantages of having Hwy 247 officially designated as a Scenic Highway by The State of California. He said he would be circulating this information to State Senator Fuller and Assemblymen Obernolte and Mayes and requesting their support.

The Scenic 247 Committee compiled many talking points, chief among them the proven attraction a Scenic Highway has for travelers. Any increase of tourism bringing outside

dollars into our desert economy makes a difference to local businesses, jobs, and County revenues as well.

The unique location, landscapes, and historic interests in the Scenic 247 corridor mesh with the County’s Mountain and Desert Recreation program. It links metropolitan and low desert visitors to Joshua Tree Gateway Communities, Route 66 and the all-year recreational opportunities in the Big Bear area.

Scenic Highway designation makes the road a destination in itself. To see *The Case for Scenic Highway 247* log on to www.scenichighway247.com