

Hazard fuel Reduction Offers new phase

Elderly, disabled homeowners may be eligible for special assistance

By Victoria Metcalf

Staff Writer

There's a clear view of a round pond and meadow expanse from the narrow road that leads to the Forbes' residence in Meadow Valley.

Until last year, overhanging branches enclosed the worn dirt track. "It was like a tunnel with the trees touching," said retired forester Dick Kielhorn.

Dense timber and heavy accumulations of dried vegetation surrounded the property owner's acre.

A Plumas County Fire Safe Council demonstration project changed all that. Bob and Pinkie Forbes, who have lived on the property since 1954, can breath a sigh of relief.

Should a wildland fire hit Meadow Valley, their home and outbuildings now have a degree of safety they haven't known in years.

On Wednesday, April 14, the site was the first stop on a round of tours by PCFSC members, project foresters and interested people.

Demo project

As members of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council continued to look for more funding and expand hazardous fuels reduction projects in major portions of the county, one special project became available. It involved creating defensible space for the elderly and disabled.

Through a recommendation by Warren Grandall, a committee member and a volunteer with the Meadow Valley Fire Department, the Forbes' property was introduced.

With the cooperation of the Forbes, Kielhorn became the forester in charge of developing the project.

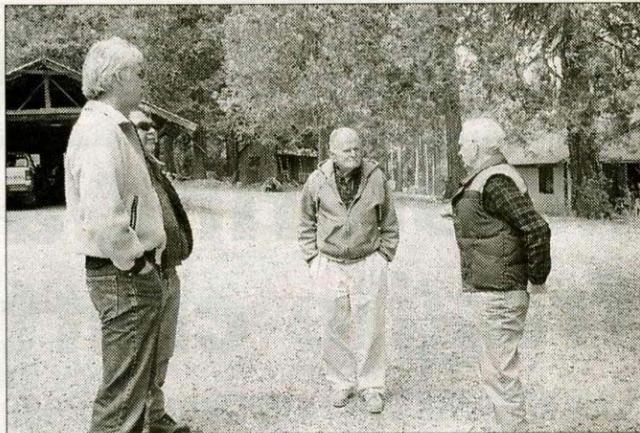
A contract showing the scope of what the council intended to do on the Forbes' property, along with their input, was developed.

Kielhorn worked with the Forbes and oversaw the process. A contract crew, Fire Storm, was hired to do the majority of the work. Using hand-clearing techniques, the crew spent

about a day on the Forbes' acre. According to plan, they cleared vegetation away from buildings, removed ladder fuels, trimmed overhanging trees and helped pile the debris.

That was last fall with several inches of snow on the ground.

Forbes. A retired Forest Service employee said he used to manage the property. As part of a local water



Fire Safe Council members Mike DeLasaux, far left, and John Sheehan talk with property owner Bob Forbes and project forester Dick Kielhorn discuss the scope of the Meadow Valley project. It is designed with the elderly or disabled home owner in mind. Over the years, the Forbes' property had become heavily overgrown, to the point they could no longer thin back their timber on their own to protect their property.



Richard Jacks originally settled the Meadow Valley property the Forbes now own. Crews cleared brush and vegetative debris from around the old cabins, not only to help save them, but to help reduce the fire danger. The dry timber would easily ignite if a spark landed in nearby brush or pine needles.

management group, he had a pond created in 1981. That has since become a handy water source in case of fire.

Keeping the property clear is now beyond Forbes' physical capabilities, but his daughter, Betsy is assisting in the final stages of the project.

Indicating debris piles, Betsy said she continued to clear areas and ready the piles for burning.

One aspect of this project is that the

road is now accessible by fire trucks. If water from the pond is needed, either on the Forbes' property or in Meadow Valley; trucks can now access it.

"We're still looking for individuals in the county," who will qualify for the project, said Jerry Hurley, a coordinator with PCFSC.

As an added protection for homeowners, contractors on these projects must be fingerprinted. According to Kielhorn, no one with a felony is allowed to work on an elderly and disabled project.

Project payment

Funding for the elderly and disabled defensible space project came from two sources. According to Hurley. Kielhorn was hired to design and oversee the project through

Title III funding allocated by the Plumas County Board of Supervisors. Funding to hire a contract crew came from Title II funding through the Plumas National Forest and the Resource Advisory Committee.

This project was conducted at a cost of \$7,500 according to Kielhorn.

"There was a lot of cutting," Kielhorn said about the labor-intensive project.

More, funding is available for landowners who qualify under the elderly and disabled categories.

Some property owners have the fiscal resources to pay for a project, but aren't physically able to assist, Hurley explained.

Some don't have the financial means to protect their homes, he said, Forbes' property qualified as a demonstration site to show others how they could benefit. The property is also adjacent to private timber company lands in one direction and Forest Service land in the other, according to Hurley.

According to PCFSC member John Sheehan, the Forest Service is scheduled to reduce hazardous fuels in that area in the near future,

"So that's where they're putting the DFPZ (the defensible fuels protection

zone) under the QLG" agreement, Sheehan said.

The location

The Forbes are the current property owners, but the site was originally settled by Richard Jacks and his family in the early 1850s.

Jacks held the original water rights, which were granted in 1854, Forbes said,

Jacks had some of the local Chinese population dug a ditch from his place and through much of the valley to provide water to other residents.

Jacks Ditch is now controlled by the Forbes and used by property owners along it.

Editor's note: This is the first in a three part series involving four PCFSC projects. The other projects are at Indian Falls, on Chandler Road and near Gansner Park.



Photo by Victoria Metcalf

Piles of limbs, removed from an acre of once densely forested private land, await burning. A contract crew spent a day on Meadow Valley property, making a world of difference for the owners. The background shows what the property resembled before the Fire Safe Council project was initiated. That property belongs to a logging company.