



MOUNTAIN EMBER TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

MET ANNUAL MEETING - February 25, 2023

Highlights of 2022 and Outlook for 2023

We are excited to invite all community members to the MET annual meeting. We will review our 2022 achievements and our goals for 2023; your involvement is essential in achieving them. Important initiatives like the Firewise application and the Oak Tree Project – extra to our ongoing work carried out by the Community Defense Team (CDT) – will lift us to a new level of short- and long-term fire preparedness.

2022 Highlights

- Expansion of Ember Stations plus additional trained members of the CDT
- Acquisition of new equipment for fire prevention
- Change of membership structure and board members
- Creation of a formal Community Defense Plan

2023 Goals

- Extend the number of MET board members for a higher impact on the community
- Involve more community members in the fire preparedness initiatives
- Submit a successful application, by March 2023, to become a Firewise community

- Create a long-term fuel break using oak trees and other fire-resistant native vegetation

Overview

2022 was a relatively quiet year. Although dry – until December – the Painted Cave community had no fires. The Mountain Ember Team (MET) continued the basic vegetation management program, including chipping days, fuel break work, and annual roadside grass and weed abatement. The network of Ember Stations was expanded, and additional trained members joined the Community Defense Team's firefighting arm. With a grant from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, we acquired new battery-powered chainsaws, weed whips, and other tools. These highly effective tools will cut costs, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions from our vegetation management operations, to say nothing of reducing noise from the old gasoline-powered equipment. The MET also experienced an unexpectedly high turnover in membership in 2022 due to the arrival of new residents, departures of older residents, and an unusual number of deaths among our senior members.

For 2023, the MET will start in February with a significant turnover in Board members and hopefully new energy and shuffling of Board responsibilities. The MET will continue the programs discussed below and undertake an innovative oak tree planting project on our northside fuel break. The Oak Tree Project will provide improved fire protection as well as enhance the fuel break habitat area. Hopefully, we will continue to expand and improve our fire defense capabilities by filling in gaps in our existing equipment and with continued training. If supported by the membership, the MET will submit an application for certification of Painted Cave as a Firewise USA community, with certain benefits described in this report. To continue all this work, however, the MET will have to meet significant fundraising challenges, as indicated in the attached financial report and proposed budget. As always, the support of the MET membership and community at large will be necessary to succeed in these efforts.

Membership

Painted Cave has seen an unusually high turnover in population over the year, with residents moving out, new residents moving in, and, unfortunately, a number of deaths of senior residents. Among these are Peggy Fowler, Willie Wood, Bill Dougherty, Dennis Stanley, and John Bowman. They will be missed. All this has affected the MET membership, which has gone from 90 in February 2021 to 72 confirmed members as of February 17, 2023. On the bright side, we have multiple first-time members who have recently joined the community and will hopefully bring additional energy to the MET. As the turnover in Painted Cave residents continues, it will be one of the MET goals for 2023 to reach out to all new residents, both to inform them about our fire danger situation, and to encourage joining the MET and becoming active members of the community.

Board of Directors

Our elected Board of Directors is the main decision-making body for the MET, and is responsible for managing finances, community outreach, and many other functions. We had a significant turnover in our Board members this year. Two long-term members – President Dennis Clegg and former President Nic Proctor – resigned after long service to spend more time on other responsibilities. They were replaced by past Board member Ina Brittain and CDT Co-Chair Phil Seymour. In addition, two of our longest-serving, and most valued members are leaving the Board after completing their current terms. Treasurer David Dellinger has moved to Washington. Our current Secretary, Jenny VanSeters, is taking a break from Board responsibilities but will continue to help with maintaining the MET website and will consult on other administrative functions. All these resigning Board members have played key roles in building the MET to its current state over the past several years and will be missed.

The good news is we now have six candidates for open Board seats, with some current members running for a second term, and others potentially bringing new energy and skills to the Board. See the ballot materials mailed last week for details. Also, the ballot includes a measure to increase the total number of Board members to eleven, the maximum number allowed by our current bylaws. This is an increase from the current number of nine authorized Board seats and would allow us to include additional talent and spread the work of the Board more equitably among Board members. Please vote on this measure.

Planning

In 2022 the MET initiated the process of preparing a formal written Community Defense Plan. The purpose of the written plan is to inform community residents of the actions planned by the MET to defend the community from wildfires, establish goals and priorities for future actions, and help with fiscal planning and possible future grant applications.

The opening section – an Overview – was approved by the MET Board in August 2022. A copy is attached to this report. The next section, on Evacuation preparedness, is under review. Additional sections on Vegetation Management, Ground Defense (the Ember Station system), and Mobile Defense will (hopefully) be completed in 2023. Note also that the draft Firewise Action Plan mentioned below includes many of the same elements that will be included in the final Community Defense Plan.

2022 Financial Summary

Prepared by David Dellinger, MET Treasurer, February 19, 2023

The MET did well financially in 2022, though both income and expenses were less than in 2021. We received \$6,244 in donations and \$3,675 in membership dues, including \$300 in early payments for 2023 dues. Of the donations, \$5,644 was for general support and \$600 was earmarked for particular uses. We spent the balance remaining in our grant from the Santa Barbara Foundation for strategic planning consulting services (\$2,540). We also began using the grant we received in 2021 from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection [CAL-FIRE] for fuel mitigation work. The total awarded was \$12,964 (to be used over the years 2022-2024), and we received \$3,350 in reimbursements in 2022 under this program. Our total 2022 income from all sources was \$13,298.

Total expenses for 2022 came to \$18,784, which was about \$5,500 more than our income. Most of our spending (\$11,049) was on items directly related to our mission: \$761 for vehicle-related expenses, \$10,204 for equipment and supplies for the Ground Defense Team and Vegetation Management, and \$84 for radios and related equipment. Administrative, IT, outreach, insurance, and other general expenses came to \$5,195. Finally, we paid \$2,540 for strategic planning consulting services.

The balance in our checking account at the end of 2021 was \$11,686.21. At the end of 2022 it was \$6,200.11. Of that amount, \$745 is held in two "restricted" accounts: \$600 for Ground Defense equipment and \$145 for support of our Chipping program. Our general operating account has a balance of \$6,461, which includes an anticipated reimbursement of \$1,005 from the CalFire Grant (we spent \$1,005 on eligible expenses in late 2022, and expect to be reimbursed in the first half of 2023). The general operating account is unrestricted, which means that it was funded by sources other than donations earmarked by the donors for a particular purpose.

Firewise USA

In 2022 the MET laid the groundwork for having the Painted Cave community certified as a Firewise community under the national Firewise USA program. Certification requires a commitment to sustaining fire safety and prevention programs for the community, such as maintaining community defensible space and individual defensible space around homes. This is something the Painted Cave community has been doing for years, and that the MET has ramped up since incorporation in 2019. Benefits of the Firewise program include fire insurance discounts for community members and access to larger programs such as those being funded through the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council. A proposed Firewise Action Plan has been circulated for community review and will be discussed at the February 25 Annual Meeting. Assuming there is adequate community support, MET will submit a Firewise application in March 2023.

Oak Tree Project

The MET's biggest new project for 2023 is creating a "shaded fuel break" on the community's north side using oak trees and other fire-resistant native vegetation which will, over time, replace chaparral regrowth. The planting of acorns is scheduled to begin in February. Follow-up measures will include supplemental plantings of elderberry bushes and native bunch grass, followed by plantings of oak seedlings in 2024 to extend the oak plantation. Funding for the project is being provided through the Regional Wildfire Mitigation Program, a regional project being funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Community Defense Team

The Community Defense Team (CDT) is the "action arm" of the Mountain Ember Team. The CDT manages vegetation management and active measures for fire defense. The main activities of the CDT are the following:

Community Chipping. CDT volunteers chip cut brush and other vegetation for residents using a powerful chipper maintained by the Wildland Residents Association. Chipping days are scheduled as needed, usually monthly in the spring and early summer. The service is free, but donations are encouraged to help maintain the chipper and pay for fuel.

Community Defensible Space (Fuel Breaks). With the cooperation of community-minded landowners, the CDT maintains a network of fuel breaks (areas cleared of major concentrations of the flammable brush) around the Painted Cave Community. Efforts for 2022 focused on the north side fuel break, which addresses the greatest threat to the community, i.e., Sundowner winds coming from the direction of East Camino Cielo. In 2023 the MET will begin the Oak Tree Project in this area to permanently displace highly flammable brush with a belt of fire-resistant oak trees.

Roadside Clearing. Under an agreement with the Santa Barbara County roads department, MET volunteers cut back dead grass and weeds along Painted Cave Road every year to prevent fire starts from such things as tossed cigarettes and sparks from vehicles. Roadside clearing also includes the periodic cutting back of brush along the roadway to preserve sight distances and provide for safer evacuation in the event of a major fire. In 2022 much of this work was accomplished with new electrically powered equipment purchased with a grant from CalFire (the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection). Although powered by high-capacity batteries, these tools have proven every bit as effective as gasoline-powered equipment formerly used for this work and are often easier to use.

Ember Stations. The Ember Station system consists of a network of pumps, hoses, water connections (water tanks, pools, hydrants), and trained volunteers who will remain in the community and combat spot fires when a major wildfire comes. In 2022 the CDT established three new ember stations and trained six new volunteers. We currently have 11 established

ember stations and 22 active CDT Fire Team members, with several more members to be trained in 2023.

Patrol Vehicles. The CDT maintains two pick-up trucks with water tanks and pumps for quick reaction to small local fires and for moving quickly to threatened areas for structure protection during a larger fire. Plans for 2023 include adding improved radios and firefighting foam capabilities.

Emergency Alerts and Communications. The CDT maintains a radio network for Fire Team members, to promote rapid mobilization and good communications during any fire incidents. In addition, MET operates the **In*Telligent** alert program for all residents of the community. The **In*Telligent** application allows residents to receive rapid alerts and updates on their cell phones. These alerts are sent out by MET dispatchers for such things as fire threats, road blockages, and other emergencies.