



What's Happening to Our Slopes?

Many of you have commented on the condition of our slopes. There are many brown areas where the old ground cover is dying off and you would like the HOA to increase the watering. Unfortunately, one of our ground cover varieties has been on the slopes for over 20 years and has reached the end of its life span. Adding more water will not revive it. We need to replant. But we also need to cut back on our water usage since continued substantial increases in the cost of water is a certainty.

After research and consulting with several water districts and plant experts, the Board has devised a plan for our long-term water needs. The only way to reduce our water use and return our slopes to green is by replanting with drought tolerant native plants. These native plants use up to 70% less water than our current plants and will accomplish our long-term goal of water reduction while maintaining attractive slopes.

Since we have ~11 acres of slope, we cannot afford to replant all the slopes at the same time. Thanks to John Frank, Al Benner, and Donna Mancuso we have a great start on replanting our slopes with drought tolerant native plants over the last year. We are taking a break from planting during hot weather to assure better success for our new plants but plan to resume at the end of October or early November.

The plan for the coming year is to get all of the planting done on this phase over about two months so we have the maximum time for the new plants to take hold before warm dry weather returns. This phase of work is going to include the slopes that are the most visible in our community and will have the biggest impact on the look of our areas. This includes work around the monuments and along Santa Petra and San Mario. Because we are learning about these plants and how they grow, we may make changes as we progress and will keep you informed in subsequent newsletters. Our new contractor will carry on this work.

New Landscape maintenance contractor: We have gone through a bidding process and selected a new contractor to maintain our slopes. The new company's name is Pro-Scape Inc. and they are well qualified to handle the job. They will have two men on site every weekday to tend to cleanup and are hoping to make our community green and beautiful in spite of drought and tired plantings. If you are having any issues with the maintenance, please contact the association to let us know what the problem is and we will try to be responsive.

Monument Re-facing - Be on the lookout for a new, updated look for our monument signs. The original ones are showing their age and don't particularly give a good impression of our beautiful community.

Why Native Plants?

By Morgan Vondrak

For many people those two words conjure up an image of prickly beige colored gardens, full of scrubby little mounds of sparsely planted perennials with a few boulders thrown in and maybe a dry stream for good measure. While there are indeed a number of "native" (and not native) landscapes that do fit that image, these gardens are more the victim of poor design choices and lack of maintenance than they are of being "native". Certainly there are a good number of native plants that do look rather scrubby and unattractive for a fair portion of the year, but for every scrubby and unattractive native plant there is an equally lovely alternative that will stay green and healthy all year round. Additionally, appropriate maintenance and minimal (*continued on back*)



'Carmel Sur' or manzanita is a truly magnificent ground cover, evergreen and luscious on slopes. Because it is drought tolerant and fire resistant, it reduces maintenance and saves money.

Vacation Rentals By Owner

Web sites such as VRBO, HomeAway, Airbnb, and others facilitate leasing properties as short-term vacation rentals. These sites encourage rental for periods as short as a few days or longer depending on the renter's preference. The short-term rates are usually much higher than the monthly rates. VRBO renting raises a number of issues. The City of Solana Beach ordinance #322 (4.47.040) prohibits rental of properties for less than seven days. This ordinance also requires the homeowner to obtain a permit from the city to rent a property for 7-30 days. Rental for more than 30 days does not require a permit. In addition, Article III (G) of the PC&Rs of our HOA states: "No noxious or offensive trade or activity shall be carried on upon said property..."

At our recent HOA meeting several homeowners voiced strong objection to short-term rental activity that is currently taking place in our HOA.

Short-term rentals not only bring strangers to our neighborhood, but also bring additional cars and noise that will lower the value of our homes.

The HOA Policy Manual is being changed to prohibit renting for less than 60 days.

FROM YOUR HOA IMPORTANT INFORMATION - PLEASE READ

The Economics of Replanting Our Slopes

The HOA generates approximately \$150,000 to \$160,000 per year from slope assessments, dues, interest income and fees. On average, total expenses track closely to this amount with slope care and maintenance accounting for about 85% of our expenses. During our fiscal year 2014, our water costs went from \$36,000 to \$48,000; a 30% increase. That same year our expenses exceeded our costs by \$3,000. We immediately started to closely monitor and reduce our water use. Due to our additional water conservation efforts we were able to reduce water costs significantly this past year giving us a little more of a cushion.

With the ever increasing cost of water and the lingering question about access to water in the future due to the drought, we are focused on the long term plan of converting our slopes to native landscaping to reduce our water dependency as much as possible.

Ideally, we'd like to convert the slopes as quickly as possible but due to our limited financial resources it will take several years to complete the process.

The PC&R's of our Association limit us to increasing our dues by 7% per year. We've been very sensitive to increasing dues and have only done so sparingly over the last several years. We have some cash reserves which we are using wisely for this project while insuring we keep enough cash on hand for contingencies.

To generate additional revenue to more quickly carry out the conversion, the only other alternative would be a special assessment that requires a 2/3's vote of our members. From past experience, it's been difficult to get enough votes for any reason, let alone a special assessment. Therefore, we're going to forge on with the landscape conversion as rapidly as finances allow. This strategy will result in our slopes looking less than ideal during the process but it will secure the long-term beauty of our community.

There will be a 7% increase in your current slope assessment bill.



Ceanothus is a versatile, evergreen lilac, which grows to 6' width while staying under 2' in height. Green leaves and light blue blossoms makes it ideal for slope coverage.

(Why Native Plants continued) supplemental watering can make the difference between a green and lush native landscape and a brown scrubby patch of wilderness.

Truly, the benefits of a well-designed and maintained native landscape using appropriate plant materials well outweigh those of traditional landscape plantings that have taken a toll on our resources for so long. The most important of these benefits relates to water savings. Traditional landscapes account for up to 70% of our potable water use in Southern California regions. With our current drought status, this practice is not only unsustainable it is simply unacceptable. Mature native landscapes have been shown to reduce water use up to 70%, which means a savings of at least half of the water currently used on traditional landscapes. This means that for areas such as slopes, native plantings are the most appropriate choice for saving water and other resources.

Additionally, for communities that share property lines with open space areas, native plantings along those interface areas create a buffer that protects the natural areas. Plants like Ice Plant, Acacia, and other invasive species that are commonly used to plant slope areas invade native open space areas. They push out native species creating habitat loss. According to the California Invasive Plant Council: "invasive species are the second-greatest threat to endangered species, after habitat destruction". By installing appropriate native species in these interface areas we are protecting our remaining wilderness areas and practicing good stewardship of our environment. By designing thoughtfully laid out landscapes using the appropriate native plant materials for our communities we can create common areas that are evergreen, drought tolerant, fire resistant, climate appropriate, reduce resource consumption, reduce maintenance, and save money. Which begs the question...why not natives?

Morgan Vondrak has provided San Elijo Hills HOA on sight consultation on plant selection, plant placement and plant maintenance. With over 10 years of experience working with California native plants Morgan has completed sustainable landscape design certification through the G3 group of Los Angeles.

Management/Bookkeeping Change

Recently our bookkeeper and outside business manager Ron Watts of LandMark Business Services announced his retirement. The HOA business management and bookkeeping job was transferred to Mother Lode Bookkeeping Inc. of Encinitas. **Please contact this business office regarding all HOA issues.** The office will then share the message with all board members. Please refrain from contacting individual board members. Thank you Our contact at Mother Lode Bookkeeping is Diane McGrath email: Diane@mlbinc.com, Phone: 760-436-9044.

Alternatively, attend the next HOA board meeting.

The HOA Website is: <http://sanelijohills1.org>

Did You Know?

Our HOA does not own any property. The adjacent homeowners own all of the slopes, but these are maintained by the HOA.