



Santa Lucia Community Services District

Upcoming Fee Renewal Election

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&
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On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Santa Lucia Community Services District

Mark Boitano: Board President
Jack Peat: Board Vice President
Melissa Thorne: Director
Cary Whitfield: Director
Ron Eastman: Director

Dear Preserve Community Member,

The Santa Lucia Community Services District (CSD) is initiating the renewal of the Brush & Fire Fuel Management Department Fee. Established in 2021 with 89% community approval, the program was a direct response to increasing wildfire threats and a deteriorating insurance landscape. This fee was initiated in a voter-approved ballot measure in 2021 that was separate from the 5-Year Plan election that includes the other CSD fees. For simplicity, these two fees will be consolidated into a single renewal election in 2030.

While the Santa Lucia Preserve Company, the CSD, and The Conservancy have undertaken efforts to synchronize wildfire prevention efforts this past year, it is important for residents to understand the difference between the Conservancy's fire prevention efforts and the CSD's **fire protection efforts**. While the Conservancy focuses on activities in the Wildlands (e.g. Grazing, Controlled Burn Programs), the core mission of the CSD's Brush & Fire Fuels Management Department is to prepare the people, equipment, and terrain to provide the most effective response to fire events. The ultimate goal of the CSD is to protect **people and structures**.

The Proposal:

- **Fixed Cost:** \$1,411 per parcel annually - the same fee level set in 2021
- **No Inflation:** No annual inflator will be applied to this fee.
- **Future Increases:** Any increase in the fee will require voter approval

What the Department Includes:

The cornerstone of this department is our in-house Fire & Fuels Management Specialist (FFMS) Emily Aiken. Keeping this specialized role in-house allows the CSD to operate with a level of expertise and responsiveness that external contractors cannot provide.

Technical Expertise & Advocacy

- **Specialized Qualifications:** The FFMS role requires high-level expertise, currently held by Emily Aiken, a specialist with a master’s degree, wildfire mapping background, and over 20 professional certifications.
- **Emergency Integration:** Emily also serves as a Reserve Firefighter with Marina Fire Department, ensuring our fire prevention strategies are grounded in active emergency response experience.
- **Insurance and Regulatory Defense:** Emily successfully challenged CAL FIRE’s 2024 map changes, preventing an unwarranted “Very High Fire Hazard” designation for critical Preserve assets like the Hacienda and Sports Club.
- **Interagency Credibility:** As the official Preserve Liaison, Emily ensures our community has a seat at the table with regional fire agencies.

Field Leadership & Infrastructure

- **Team Coordination:** Emily leads a dedicated field team, including a Trail Boss and Trail Boss Assistant, who are responsible for large-scale vegetation management across The Preserve’s trails and critical fuel breaks.
- **Grant and Asset Management:** Emily was instrumental in securing a \$196,000 CAL FIRE grant for a remote controlled masticator (aka “Chewie”) and manages the full lifecycle of equipment assets to ensure operational readiness and grant compliance.
- **Advanced Monitoring:** Emily manages the CSD’s GIS (mapping) capabilities and maintains privileged access to A.I.-assisted wildfire cameras for immediate emergency monitoring.

Clearly Visible Results in Protecting Preserve Families and Structures



Pictured: A before and after comparison of defensible space work conducted by Emily Aiken and her grant-funded remote controlled masticator, nicknamed “Chewie”.

Four Years of Accomplishments (FY 2021-2025)

The community’s investment has yielded quantifiable results in cost-effective risk mitigation.

- **Significant Savings:** Utilizing in-house staff and the grant-funded masticator provides an estimated operational savings of \$3,000 per day compared to hiring external vendors.
- **Critical Fuel Break Maintenance:** The team maintains 443 acres alongside major access roads and historical fuelbreaks throughout The Preserve and 80 miles of trails to provide year-round safety and tactical access.
- **Owner Benefits:** Achieved 90% compliance rate for lot-specific Fuel Management Plans while eliminating the \$2,500 renewal cost and \$500 administrator fee for owners.
- **Safety Infrastructure:** Completed the Fire Personnel Bunkhouse and deployed a fully equipped off-road Emergency Response Vehicle.

The Case for Renewal

The initial investment established our infrastructure; renewal is essential to sustain our professional labor and long-term sustainability.

- **Protecting Capital Investments:** Renewal is required to operate and house assets like the masticator and emergency vehicles for their full intended lifespan.
- **Recurring Maintenance:** Vegetation regrowth is constant; annual professional labor is required to maintain the 443 acres of fuel breaks and keep our safety profile intact.
- **Permanent Threat Protection:** The risk of catastrophic wildfire is ongoing; maintaining this program is essential to defending The Preserve's insurability and safety.

From Your Neighbors: Community Impact

Neighbors who have worked with Emily Aiken and her field team highlight the department’s dual impact on safety and property value:

“I made a new friend a couple of months ago. Her name is Chewie. Our story together is brief but compelling.

*We're in the process of completing a secondary structure on my Preserve property, which gave me the opportunity and imperative to update my Fuel Management Plan (FMP). As should be the case with all Preserve owners, we take wildfire preparation seriously. Our Fire & Fuels Management Specialist, Emily Aiken, paid a visit and advised on appropriate remediation work. In addition to her advice, she then told me a story about Chewie, and I immediately became interested in a working relationship. While I still haven't met Chewie in-person, I allowed her to graze on an overgrown area within my new FMP, an area that wasn't within my old FMP. **Chewie did a great job — the area is now free of fuel and therefore safer,** but it also looks considerably better. The remains of the brush just laid down into wood chips*

and looks fantastic. I appreciated Chewie's work so much that I've invited her back for another meal in another overgrown area within my FMP.

I'll note that I was self-insured at The Preserve because my previous insurance company essentially walked away from my business, and from what they perceived as my risk. I now have insurance again, enabled by thoughtful remediation work to limit the risk and encourage underwriting. While Chewie may not have been the leader of the team to make my property safer, Chewie was an important and unassuming team member" – Brian Kelleher

"We are newish owners of Lot 138 at 62 Chamisal Pass. We purchased the lot in May of 2023 without really knowing what was required of lot maintenance at The Preserve, nor had the lot been maintained prior to our purchase. It had a lot of brush, grass, and is fairly wooded by coastal oaks in the middle and a mix of trees and brush on a steep slope.

We were approached by The Preserve to try out the new masticator "Chewie" as our lot has some natural obstacles such as trees, slopes, rocks, and was overgrown. It is not a flat lot, it is a dell bordered by gentle and not so gentle slopes. We eagerly agreed to have Chewie on the lot. We also had guide wires and flagging up designating where we will build. We were very pleased with the work done. Chewie takes out a lot of brush and undergrowth, and yet when I personally saw the lot about 8 weeks later it looked much neater and yet still natural. We are motivated to have a very well-maintained perimeter and to take out as much fuel as possible without destroying the native trees as we are Palisades fire survivors" – Michelle and John Cowell

"Thank you so much for the absolutely superb job you and Chewie have done on our property!! We COULD NOT be more grateful for your work – from the perspectives of both fuel management AND aesthetics. We feel so much safer now and are also awestruck by the spectacular look of our property!!" – Teri and Andy Goodman

Election Timeline

The CSD will commence the election process with a mailed notification of a 45-day protest period.

Tentative 2026 Schedule:

- **January 21:** Mail 45-Day Notice of Protest Hearing.
- **March 11:** Hold Protest Hearing / Mail Ballots to Parcel Owners.
- **April 27:** Hold Board Meeting to validate election results.

Kindly direct any questions to csd@santaluciapreserve.com