



## TOPANGA TOWN COUNCIL

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Topanga, CA 90290

Dear Members of the County Redistricting Committee:

The Topanga Town Council urges the County Redistricting Committee to keep our town of 10,000 residents connected with the communities that touch its boundaries on all sides. We encourage the Redistricting Commission to allow Topanga to continue to enjoy the fruits of the current and past districting plans that have been in place since 1991 & 2000 respectively, which allow our town to be completely and firmly planted in the surrounding communities. This will continue to ensure stability in shared projects and programs effecting our lifestyle, environment, livelihood, safety, education, growth and spirit.

Topanga was first settled in 1839 and has always been a unique, historic and isolated wildland community occupying 13,000 acres within the Santa Monica Mountains. However, Topanga does not exist independently. Our neighbors of Malibu, Pacific Palisades, Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades and Woodland Hills have played a significant role in the shaping of Topanga because of our similar interest---the Santa Monica Mountains.

In particular, the emergency issues faced by our mountain neighbors are as intimately intertwined as the natural surroundings. The fires, flooding, mud and rockslides that are part and parcel of this natural environment, don't start or end with a single community. They affect us all and require continued, joint cooperation and preparedness planning. Unlike grid cities where one area can be easily separated from another, the communities of the Santa Monica Mountains area have a closely connected and symbiotic relationship.

For example, the boulder that closed Topanga Canyon Boulevard in the 2005 winter storms, equally affected the commuters from the Las Virgenes and West San Fernando Valleys on their way to school and jobs in the Westside. Frequent emergency closures on PCH impact all of these communities because traffic is diverted through Topanga Canyon, the primary mountain connector between the SFV and the Westside. The 1993 Old Topanga Canyon/Malibu Fire roared through the Santa Monica Mountains to the sea, burning Topanga, and Malibu, and threatening Pacific Palisades and Calabasas. Since then, jointly prepared and pre-rehearsed evacuation and emergency preparedness exercises with our surrounding communities, municipalities, and our first responder agencies have made disaster response more effective and better managed. One shining example of this County-Community effort is the Topanga Survival Guide, proving that relationships beyond Topanga will ensure increased survival rates during a local disaster.

**On the local front, Topanga has many programs that integrate with surrounding communities:**

**CERT** – The Topanga Certified Emergency Response Team is comprised of local volunteers that work

in harmony with Malibu, Calabasas, Agoura Hills and West Hills CERT groups, both in cross-training and actual emergency response.

**ARSON WATCH** – Topanga’s Arson Watch, a Los Angeles County Sheriff’s program, works in tandem with the Calabasas and Malibu Arson Watch organizations during Red Flag and High Fire Hazardous conditions. The Arson Watch surveillance routes cross multiple municipal and jurisdictional boundaries across the entire Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and expand into Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Malibu, and Woodland Hills.

**SCHOOLS** – Beyond Topanga’s local LAUSD Elementary Charter School, our youth continue their middle school and high school education in Malibu, Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades, Calabasas, and San Fernando Valley located public school districts. For those pursuing higher education, community colleges in Santa Monica (SMCC), and the San Fernando Valley (Pierce Community College), and public universities including UCLA and California State University in Northridge, all offer advanced education opportunities in proximity to our community and are a distinct community of interest for all students.

**ANIMAL RESCUE/LACODACC/ERT**– During a wildfire disaster, Topanga’s trained and certified all-volunteer animal rescue groups (e.g. Equine Response Teams, Topanga Animal Rescue) are activated and work in harmony with the Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care & Control, and rely on SFV and Las Virgenes Valley shelters where animals must be evacuated and/or treated. Pre-rehearsed evacuation plans with animal rescue organizations have been in existence for decades. LACO Agoura Hills Animal Shelter, Pierce College, and other small and large animal emergency centers are essential for the safe evacuation and care of our large and small animals during catastrophic disasters like a wildfire.

**SENIORS** – Topanga’s local senior organization, the Canyon Sages, has over 100 volunteers and members inside and outside of Topanga Canyon providing critical support to our aging community. Topanga, lacking its own dedicated senior center, relies upon senior programs offered in Santa Monica, Woodland Hills, Canoga Park and Calabasas to help aid and provide activities for our senior population. Access Services, Dial-a-Ride, and a County-sponsored summer Beach Bus, provide essential transportation for these Topanga seniors, a growing population.

**T-CEP** – Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness is an all-volunteer organization within Topanga that activates its Emergency Operation Center during a disaster. Established in 1994, after the devastating 1993 Old Topanga/Malibu Fire, T-CEP works collaboratively with various County emergency organizations and first responders to prepare, inform and educate residents in Topanga about potential disasters, and provide updated emergency information during a disaster for local and surrounding communities. The T-CEP EOC is self-activating, but works directly with Incident Command to provide vital, verified information to not only Topanga residents, but to surrounding mountain communities and their citizens, as well. In the 1996 Calabasas Fire, the T-CEP EOC Hotline operators received over 16,000 calls requesting status information on the Fire. Many of these calls came from Malibu citizens who did not, at the time, have their own EOC.

**DRT** – The Disaster Radio Team of Topanga is a group within T-CEP and is part of the Inter Op-22 Group, headquartered at the Los Hills Sheriff’s Station in Calabasas; and consists of the regions of Malibu, Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Hidden Hills, Oak Park, Westlake Village and Topanga. This alliance of communicators is critical when disasters strike. All government agencies have communication issues in the Santa Monica Mountains and often rely on the verified information collected and distributed by T-CEP and its DRT. During an emergency, the DRT is scheduled to update Topanga’s emergency status with DCS-22 at the bottom of every hour, whereby T-CEP is then able to pass critical information about needs or problems to the government agencies that can address them. And vice-versa. The information received, can be given out to the residents via T-CEP’s website, manned Hotline phone bank, and through T-CEP’s Neighborhood Network teams. The DRT has volunteers

from Pacific Palisades, Calabasas, Malibu and Hidden Hills.

**TEM TASK FORCE** – The Topanga Emergency Management Task Force is, perhaps, the greatest example of ‘communities of interests’ integrating services and programs for the greater good of the mountain community. Authorized by the Los Angeles County Board of Directors to create community-based emergency management and preparedness plans for the unincorporated at-risk community of Topanga, government and community members began meeting in 2003 to develop emergency response strategies. The Topanga Disaster Survival Guide was the first product of this effort. Addressing preparedness and planning issues for all kinds of disasters, it was published by the County and distributed to over 10,000 residents. This Survival Guide is the “bible” by which Topanga prepares, plans, and exercises its community for disasters. An essential component of the Survival Guide is the Topanga Zone Map that divides the Canyon into 9 “tactical zones”, and identifies Community Safety Areas, and Neighborhood Safety Areas within those zones to serve evacuees attempting to escape fire.

Another joint effort was the publication of “A Road Map to Fire Safety”, a collaboration of the TEM Task Force (disaster related public agencies, departments and communities) and the Santa Monica Mountains Fire Safe Alliance to present solutions and resources for property owners and land managers to improve stewardship in the wildland urban interface. This Alliance helps create safer communities and protect the natural areas by involving and educating stakeholders, sharing information, and locating and providing beneficial resources.

Every year since the publication of the Survival Guide (and supporting materials), these evacuation strategies are tested in a Los County Fire Department-coordinated Topanga Emergency Exercise, working in conjunction with the Topanga Community, the LA County Fire Department, Sheriff’s Department, Animal Care & Control, CHP, LAUSD, Los Angeles OEM, LA City Fire and Police, plus State and National Parks, to prepare, protect and defend Topanga (and surrounding communities) in the event of a wildfire or other major disaster. It is imperative these ongoing relationships continue to practice and collaborate; integrating lessons learned from drills and actual disaster events. The TEM Task Force is mandated to meet within 30 days of any declared disaster to debrief and re-examine the effectiveness of their emergency response strategies. Lives depend upon this continued collaboration.

The Topanga Emergency Management Task Force is co-chaired by LA County OEM (Office of Emergency Management) and T-CEP, Topanga’s community, volunteer organization. Appointed members include: Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor’s 3<sup>rd</sup> District, LA County OEM Los Angeles County Fire Department, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, California Highway Patrol, Los Angeles County Public Works, LAUSD/Topanga Elementary School, LACDAC ERT, Topanga Town Council, Topanga Animal Rescue, American Red Cross, Arson Watch, CERT, Topanga Coalition of Emergency Preparedness, and Topanga Chamber of Commerce.

**PARKS & BEACHES**– The communities of Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Westlake, Malibu, Topanga reside in a unique wildland/urban interface that includes Federal and State parklands and other publically owned open space under the umbrella of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). Topanga itself is completely surrounded by this parkland and offers a connection to surrounding cities via its roads and park trails. Topanga State Park is entirely within the Los Angeles city limits and is considered the world’s largest wildland within the boundaries of a major city. The park is bound: on the south by Pacific Palisades and Brentwood, on the west by Topanga Canyon, and on the east by Rustic Canyon.

Topanga State Park offers more than 24 trail entrances---from Topanga, Pacific Palisades, and Encino; and makes up 5% of the area of the City of Los Angeles. A local volunteer organization, the Topanga Canyon Docents offer field trip programs that are free to the public, schools, church and private schools in Simi Valley, San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy was established by the California State Legislature in 1980, to form an "interlinking system of urban, rural and river parks open space, trails, and wildlife habitats that are easily accessible to the general public. The Conservancy works closely with Topanga and surrounding communities to protect this area for future generations to enjoy.

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is a local government public entity established in 1985 pursuant to the Joint Powers Act. The MRCA works in cooperation with the Conservancy and other local government partners (including Topanga Emergency Management Task Force) in part, to participate in vital emergency planning processes, education programs and fire prevention awareness.

The Santa Monica Mountains is well-recognized as a community of interest by business groups who understand that the parks and public spaces, its creeks and beaches, are a major economic engine with over 30 million visitors each year, many of whom are regularly drawn from the nearby regions of the San Fernando Valley and the greater Westside communities. Topanga State Beach is just one area beach that is visited by locals and vacationers alike. Access to this beach is from PCH at Topanga Canyon Blvd (Malibu) and has direct handicap access onto the beach.

**ONETOPANGA.COM** – The Topanga Town Council has just launched a community website called, OneTopanga.com, which serves local and surrounding communities, as well as visitors to our canyon. It provides a direct link to all organizations and businesses serving Topanga. The Community Calendar is one of the popular features that help residents find local and County events, and meetings affecting our community. Another feature, the Emergency Information section, puts people in direct contact with first responders, preparedness programs, resources and volunteer groups. The Topanga Resource section is a direct link to the County Supervisor's Office, State and Federal Governments, and cooperating agencies. Future website phases will include webinars, blogs, commentary, surveys and opinion polls.

**TOPANGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY** – The local historical society has produced a large, hard-bound book entitled, *The Topanga Story*, which is now in its second edition. The volunteers of this society have worked many, many years with the surrounding communities of Malibu, Pacific Palisades and other areas in Los Angeles acquiring an accurate, historical perspective of not only Topanga, but also areas touching and influencing Topanga's boundaries.

**On the extended front, surrounding communities offer Topanga residents & businesses essential services and opportunities:**

**BUSINESS** - Art & Entertainment Industry - Topanga's socio-economic traits and employment are in direct alignment with cities like Malibu, Calabasas, Pacific Palisades Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Hollywood, Studio City and Universal City. It is estimated that 60% of Topanga's residents work in the outlying communities. About 40% work in entertainment/art (or related) industries---tying them to areas beyond Topanga .

**SHOPPING-ENTERTAINMENT** – Given the limited shopping and entertainment opportunities within our town, Topangans rely upon stores in the surrounding communities for their day-to-day existence: groceries, clothes, supplies, services and entertainment. The San Fernando Valley has the most to offer both in variety and economical choices. Santa Monica offers unique products and services for our residents. Many outlying area businesses have one-to-one relationships with Topanga businesses, residents, seniors, low-income residents and our volunteer organizations. The Topanga Chamber of Commerce has spent years building bridges of commerce by offering memberships within and outside the Topanga community.

**MEDICAL** – With no major medical facility within Topanga, residents must rely upon the medical services outside the canyon: St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, or the valley hospitals of West Hills,

Kaiser and Northridge.

**TRANSPORTATION** – Topanga has no local or mass transit transportation service, which leaves some residents and employees totally dependent on outside area transportation programs. Dial-A-Ride, Access Service and Los Angeles County’s Summer Beach Bus, along with the Expo Line, Orange Line and Blue Line are critical to connecting Topanga to the San Fernando Valley, the Westside and beyond. These integrated transportation services are vital to the livelihood and lifestyle of many of our residents, employees and visitors.

Topanga’s Hwy 27 serves as an important transportation bridge from the Valley to the West side, serving 15,000 commuters per day.

**CRIME & PATROL** – The Las Virgenes area is a community of interest spanning the cities of Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Westlake Village, Hidden Hills, Topanga and other nearby unincorporated areas. These cities are all County “contract cities” and are served as a unit by the same Sheriff’s Station, Fire Stations and County Services. Topanga is protected and served by the Lost Hills (Calabasas) Sheriff’s Department and West Valley (Woodland Hills) CHP. The Topanga Town Council has worked hard to develop and maintain an effective, united working relationship with the Sheriff’s Dept. and CHP; all of who agree that Topanga is a difficult community to protect, given our terrain, commuter traffic, and potential disaster situation. The Town Council, with support of these agencies has developed a Topanga Resident Access Card that enables these emergency responders to better assist local residents during a catastrophe.

In conclusion, Topanga’s association with its surrounding communities, both the Valley and Beach, is a harmonious, organic, symbiotic, living relationship whose supportive, collaborative and united effort has for many years, ensured the safety, social and economic programs we commonly share. Keeping us united with our neighboring cities will continue to give us the ability to share our environmental structure, community consciousness, educational commitment and personal lifestyle. The 1991 and 2000 districting plans have proved successful. Our neighbors of Malibu, Pacific Palisades, Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades and Woodland Hills should be kept together. Our request to the County Redistricting Committee is to keep it this way. We thank the Committee for its time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

The Topanga Town Council

Topanga Association for a Scenic Community

Topanga Watershed Committee

Topanga Animal Rescue