



TOPANGA TOWN COUNCIL

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Dear County Redistricting Commissioners:

The Topanga Town Council urges the County Redistricting Commission (CRC) to keep our town of 11,000+ residents connected to the communities that touch its boundaries on all sides from the mountains to the coasts. Such a plan would allow our town to be completely and firmly planted within the surrounding communities with which we share many of the same challenges and concerns. These include, but are not limited to: Malibu, Pacific Palisades, Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Santa Monica, Pacific Palisades and Woodland Hills.

We have worked collaboratively across our sister communities for decades to compel our legislative leaders to develop cutting-edge wildfire prevention and resilience plans. Now, in a post Woolsey environment characterized by rapid climate change, there is still so much more that we must tackle together.

We have long fought arm-in-arm to protect coastal-mountain resources from drought, degradation and habitat destruction, tirelessly educating our legislators on the importance of protecting our watersheds and safeguarding contiguous habitat for our beleaguered mountain lion and Monarch butterfly populations. For these reasons, we encourage the Redistricting Commission to allow Topanga to continue with the districting plans that have been in place since 1991, 2001 and 2011 respectively.

It is worth noting that our request dovetails with the CRC's own priority of "continuity of geography." Thus, keeping these mountain and coastal communities entwined will help ensure stability in shared projects and programs affecting our 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, do not 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 have a closely connected and symbiotic relationship.

For example, the Woolsey and recent Palisades fire that closed Topanga Canyon Boulevard for days on end, equally affected residents and commuters from the Las Virgenes and West San Fernando Valleys on their way to schools and jobs on the West side. Frequent emergency closures on PCH impact all of these communities because traffic is diverted through Topanga Canyon, the primary mountain connector between the San Fernando Valley and the West side.

Ever since the 1993 Old Topanga Canyon/Malibu Fire that roared through the Santa Monica Mountains to the sea, burning Topanga and Malibu and threatening Pacific Palisades and Calabasas, the need for a cross-community effort to counter wildfire threats has become urgent. In recognition of that compelling need, our communities have all joined forces to prepare and rehearse evacuation and emergency preparedness exercises with our surrounding communities, municipalities, and our first responder agencies over the decades. This collaboration across communities has made our disaster response more effective and better managed. One shining example of this County Community is the recently held (on August 12, 2021) virtual evacuation drill for which 700 participants from across the Santa Monica Mountains registered.

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 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.

CANYON SAGES (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 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 all provide essential transportation for these Topanga seniors, a growing population.

TCEP – 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, TCEP 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 TCEP 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.

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 is one of the products of this effort. 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. Note that Topanga is currently helping sister communities develop a similar Zone program to facilitate evacuations and repopulations.

PARKS & BEACHES– The communities of Calabasas, Agoura Hills, Westlake, Malibu, Topanga reside in a unique wildland urban interface (WUI) that includes Federal and State parklands and other publicly 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 natural areas 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 local Conservancies and other local government partners 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 local 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 maintains 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.

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 over 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 demographic and employment patterns parallel those of 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 outlining 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 a critical transportation bridge from the Valley to the West side, serving 20,000+ 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, 2001, and 2011 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 Commission is to keep it this way. We thank the Commission for its time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

The Topanga Town Council