

I am in favor of the County having the authority to swiftly require property owners to remove hazardous vegetation (HV) and rubbish and if they refuse contracting with private masticators for removal and maintenance of extinction of the HV.

This spring, I found a grant the State Department of Agriculture was giving to County Commissioners of Agriculture. I prepared and got approved by the Department of Planning a proposal to remove gorse in Caspar called Gorse Out. The Commissioner of Ag applied for and got \$40,000 of the State grant. The money came from the State Noxious Weed program. Gorse qualified and is defined as a noxious weed. It is also as flammable as kerosene. Tens of acres of gorse were masticated under this grant this month to the relief of many who find the weed noxious and a fire hazard.

In contacting a legislative aide, I found out the State grants, in a statute, the power of the County Commissioner of Ag to remove noxious weeds from properties when the land owner refuses to remove themselves. The Commissioner has the citation to the statute. This is a cumbersome and burdensome process.

The Commissioner has to inquire and notify the landowner. Then after weeks or months and a refusal to act, the Commissioner has to contract with someone to remove the noxious weeds (most certainly gorse, but also likely scotch broom, or another Australian invasive). Who pays for removal initially? Can the land owner be forced to reimburse? Open questions.

So an expedited process should be put in place, given that Mendocino County now has the dubious distinction of having well over one million acres burnt in the last four years.

First of all, a new ordinance should provide a waiver from Planning Department review of removal within the coastal zone or an automatic exemption from Coastal Zone regulations. It took months before the Planning Department approved the Caspar exclusion and more months before action could be taken.

Second, there should be a waiver from biological review re occupation of the vegetation by birds or rodents. In this new age of climate induced global warming, people trump birds and rodents. No one should wait until the September fire season to begin removal of hazardous or noxious plants. Better a bird loose a nest than a household their lives.

Third, the County Fire Safe Council should be required to automatically apply for a million dollars a year from Cal Fire to specifically remove HV. The grant period is now open and Cal Fire is only too happy to see hazards removed.

Fourth the County Fire Safe Council should allocate at least 200,000 dollars of grant money it receives yearly to the fire safe council closest to Caspar. There are hundreds of acres of gorse growing both East and West of Highway 1 and from north of Van Dam Park to south of the 409 road. Each of these acres of gorse is capable of starting a conflagration that fire fighters have found they are pressed to repress. Gorse will regrow forever if yearly grazing and mastication of new growth is not continued for at least 50 years.

Fifth, the ordinance should specify the administrative costs of removal HV shall be borne by the County. No one should make their living off of grants to remove hazardous vegetation except masticators. Extensive review of the literature shows that yearly treatment, monitoring, and removal is the only way to suppress and ultimately defeat gorse. But to do so each and every infested property in an area must be treated and the county has to provide the legal tools to make sure recalcitrant or obstreperous land owners do not defeat a long term program.