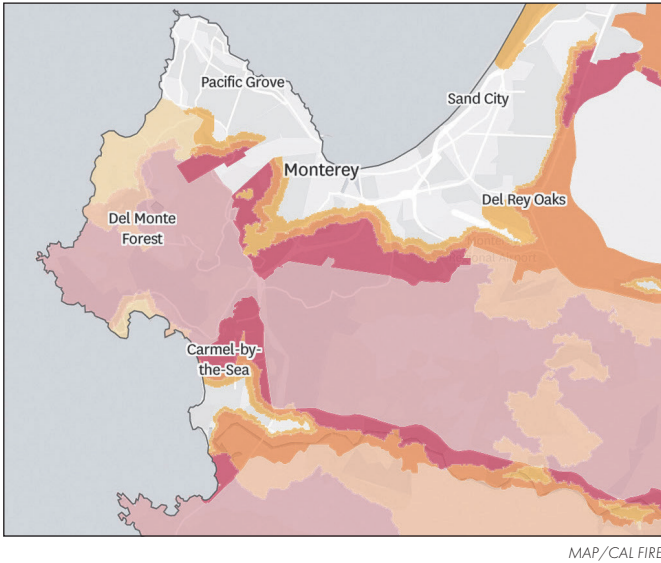


New maps: Fire hazard worse than you thought

By KELLY NIX

THE CALIFORNIA Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has released new maps designating tens of thousands of acres in Monterey County cities and unincorporated areas as “high” and “very high” wildfire hazard



This map depicts “fire hazard severity zones” in the Monterey Peninsula. The areas in bolder colors are where city fire agencies respond to fires.

zones. On Monday, Cal Fire released updated “fire hazard severity zone” maps, which were last drawn in 2011. “The fire hazard severity model for wildland fire has two key elements: probability of an area burning and expected fire behavior under extreme fuel and weather conditions,” Cal Fire said. “The zones reflect areas that have similar burn probabilities and fire behavior characteristics.” The state considers fire history, existing and potential natural vegetation fuel, predicted flame length, blowing embers, and terrain in designating severity zones as “moderate,” “high,” and “very high.” The state formerly only mapped the “very high” category.

More acreage

The Cal Fire maps include areas where local city and county fire departments are responsible for responding to wildfires. There is a lot more land in Monterey County in the fire hazard severity zones than in 2011, in part because of the addition of the “moderate” and “high” zones and expansion of the “very high” zones. For example, Carmel-by-the-Sea has a total of 488 acres designated as fire hazard zones, compared to 221 acres in 2011. Pacific Grove went from 82 acres to 372, while the City of Monterey increased

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Couple wins bid for metal roof

By MARY SCHLEY

FINDING THAT the planning commission erred in denying a couple’s request in January to install a metal roof on their contemporary-style home on Santa Lucia Avenue, the Carmel City Council unanimously overturned that decision last week. The vote marks a victory not just for the homeowners, but perhaps for others who have had similar applications denied.

“We needed a metal roof a year ago,” commented homeowner Missy Jensen, who, with her husband, JD, applied in October 2024 to replace the aging wood-shake roof on their Mark Mills-designed home.

Their application was the third of three similar applications considered by the planning commission that night in January after an hour-long, sometimes heated discussion on roofing materials in general. At that meeting, commissioners approved one application for a metal roof on a simple wood-sided house, denied the second, and then also denied the Jensens’ application after a motion to approve it failed 2-2. Those who didn’t get the metal roofs they wanted were told to find an alternative material that would be acceptable to the city.

Steel roofs are ‘practical, durable, fireproof and in keeping with the aesthetics’

Just ‘no’

Associate planner Jake Olander recommended the council back the commission’s decision on the Jensens’ application, but commissioners hadn’t even considered how a metal roof would be suitable for their home in particular, the couple’s appeal argued.

Instead, after approving the first one, two commissioners said they didn’t want to OK any others “because the current rules are obsolete and they could not make an

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Sewer district gets OK to replace Scenic main

By MARY SCHLEY

THE CARMEL Area Wastewater District will install 2 miles of new sewer line — including nearly a mile along busy Scenic Road between Ocean and Santa Lucia avenues — as part of an overhaul of its decades-old system. The work on Scenic is expected to take three weeks and will be done during the slower season, in January and February 2026, with a break for the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, the Carmel City Council was told last Monday.

Older than the city

The entire project, which includes replacing sewer mains on some roads on Carmel Point, will begin after Labor Day and should take nine months, according to Patrick Treanor, CAWD’s district engineer. It’s part of the district’s broad efforts to upgrade its system, much of which dates back more than 75 years, and is expected to cost \$4.7 million. CAWD is funded by fees billed to property

owners on their twice-a-year tax bills. The sewer district, founded in 1908, predates the city itself, Treanor pointed out, and many of its old pipes are made of clay. “It’s prone to fracturing, and roots will grow into the pipes because the plants like the water,” he explained. In an effort to minimize the risks of sinkholes and sewer spills — especially near the ocean — the plan calls for replacing the mains with flexible, seamless, tough new ones.

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As Packer retires, new Montage CEO takes helm

By KELLY NIX

THE NEW president and CEO of Montage Health, Michael McDermott, will start the job late next week, replacing Steven Packer, who is retiring after 26 years in the role.

McDermott, whose first day at work will be March 21, called it “an honor” to join Montage, which he said is a “leader in healthcare in Monterey County.”

“I look forward to building upon the incredible work Dr. Packer has done and leading this organization with a continued focus on innovation, community-centered care, and the highest standards of local healthcare delivery,” McDermott said.

For the past decade, McDermott, a diagnostic and interventional radiologist, was CEO of nonprofit Mary Washington Healthcare in Fredericksburg, Va. Montage, the parent company of CHOMP, is also a nonprofit.

‘Incredible legacy’

He moved to the area with his wife, Chrissy, which puts them closer to their two sons, who live in California. “We are thrilled to welcome Dr. McDermott into the Montage Health family,” Patrick Burke, chair of Montage Health’s board of trustees, said. “Dr. Packer has built an incredible legacy, and we have every confidence that Dr. McDermott will continue to elevate this organization and further our commitment to improving the health and well-being of our community.”

Montage spokeswoman Monica Sciuto told The Pine Cone Thursday that Packer’s last day as president and CEO is March 20.

Under his leadership, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula grew into a regional healthcare company with dozens of new facilities and many more employees. He’s credited with leading significant advancements,

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PHOTO/COURTESY MONTAGE HEALTH

Michael McDermott is the new president and CEO of Montage Health. He is succeeding Steve Packer (right) after 26 years.

NEWSOM THE PODCASTER SHOCKS DEMOCRATIC ALLIES

By CAITLIN CONRAD

THE GOVERNOR of California has a new job: podcaster. And why not? Everyone else is doing it.

“This is Gavin Newsom” launched March 6 and the long-format, unscripted episodes provide evidence the California Democrat is shifting toward the political center — something he’ll probably have to do if he wants to run for president in 2028.

Surprise guests

On his podcast, the Governor hosts one-on-one sit-down conversations lasting an hour. To date, his guests have been Charlie Kirk, Michael Savage and Steve Bannon, who all have one thing in common — they’re not Democrats. It aligns with the premise of the show, which is to have honest discussions with people whose views don’t always align with the governor’s. But in the very

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