

The Rancho Santa Fe Association's
“COVENANT FOREST HEALTH STUDY”
Dated January 2019

A CALL TO ACTION TO PRESERVE OUR FOREST

A CALL TO ACTION:

As documented in the Forest Health Study, the Covenant area forest continues to be healthy overall and is a major contributor to the exceptional quality of life enjoyed in our community.

There are, however, some portions of the Covenant area which have experienced a decline in their forest health as a result of the drought and the arrival of pests and diseases which have attacked drought-stressed trees. It is likely that other portions of the Covenant area forest will also experience challenges such as these in the foreseeable future as a result of continuing climate change.

These challenges need to be addressed, primarily through actions taken by Covenant residents themselves, since 95% of the trees within the Covenant area are on private property and outside of the Association's and the Fire District's direct authority. It is very important that Covenant area private property owners and the community-at-large take action to both remove dead trees and to replace them with resilient trees, as recommended in the Study – i.e., plant “the right trees in the right places”. The future health of our forest depends upon this.

All of our community members need to act now to address current challenges and to prepare for future challenges. We have the opportunity to take thoughtful action as a community today to assure a healthy and beautiful Covenant area forest now and in the future. If we do not take action now, our community will become more desert-like as the years pass. However, if we do take action now, we will continue to have a vibrant and healthy forest and to enjoy the many benefits that it brings us today and will bring for generations to come.

We are the beneficiaries of past generations who planted trees in our community. Now we need to plant “the right trees in the right places” to assure that future generations of Covenant area residents have a beautiful community forest as a result of our efforts.

Twenty, thirty and forty years from now, our community's residents will either say, “Thank goodness the residents made the effort in 2019 to assure the continuing health of our community's forest!” OR they will say, “They should have made a major effort to assure the health of our community's forest but they didn't.” We cannot afford the latter.

There is a wise proverb that says: “The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” If we act today to do the right things with regard to our Covenant area forest, we will have a profound positive impact on our community for many generations to come.

If not us, then who? If not now, then when? It has to be us. It has to be now. Everyone in our community benefits.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY BECOMES ENGAGED IN ENSURING THE CONTINUED HEALTH OF OUR VALUABLE FOREST FOR THE PRESENT AND FOR THE FUTURE. WHAT WILL YOU DO AS PART OF THIS EFFORT?

BACKGROUND – OUR COMMUNITY FOREST AND THE FOREST HEALTH STUDY:

Very few communities are as densely forested and have an identity as heavily intertwined with its forest as the Rancho Santa Fe Covenant area.

Much of the Southwestern portion of the Covenant area was planted with Eucalyptus trees by the Santa Fe Railroad in the early 1900s. We find ourselves today with nearly one-fifth of the Covenant area planted with approximately 56,000 Eucalyptus trees originally intended to be harvested for railroad ties. The rest of the Covenant area was planted with Eucalyptus and other tree varieties by individual property owners.

In the late 1990s, invasive insects and diseases found their way to Rancho Santa Fe and, along with continuing drought conditions, these insects and diseases have resulted in the loss of thousands of trees, including Eucalyptus, citrus and other varieties. Many more of these trees are lost each year. In addition to losing the benefits of these dead trees when alive, dead trees increase the fire threat within the Covenant if not removed on a timely basis.

In 2012, the Rancho Santa Fe Association established a Forest Health and Preservation Committee (FHPC) to protect and enhance the health of the natural environment of the Rancho Santa Fe Covenant area.

In December 2016, the creation of a “Covenant Forest Health Study” was initiated by the Rancho Santa Fe Association and its FHPC for the following purposes:

1. To evaluate the composition and health of the Covenant area forest (i.e., the trees in the area governed by the Covenant of RSF),
2. To educate the members of our community regarding “best practices” related to our forest’s health, and
3. To encourage community members to become actively involved in assuring that our forest is healthy today and remains healthy in the future.

Two consultants, Tree San Diego and Dudek, were hired by the Association to create the majority of the Study's content and both are to be commended for their excellent work on this Study.

The Rancho Santa Fe Association Forest Health Study has been completed and provides an overview of our forest's health and recommendations for its preservation.

FOREST HEALTH STUDY OVERVIEW

Executive Summary – TREE SAN DIEGO Portion of the Study:

The Value of the Covenant Forest – The Covenant area forest provides the following benefits to all owners and residents in the community:

Global Environmental Benefits

- Trees use carbon dioxide when they grow and sequester this carbon in their wood, thereby reducing the levels of carbon and greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. The world's forests (including that of Rancho Santa Fe) play a significant role in offsetting the effects of global warming through this carbon sequestration.
- Trees produce life-supporting oxygen. Trees are appropriately known as "The lungs of the earth."
- Tree roots hold soil in place, reducing erosion and diminishing the impact of rainfall on barren surfaces. Over 10,000 tons of soil are saved annually by trees in an area the size of Rancho Santa Fe.
- Trees provide food, shade and shelter for a wide variety of birds and animals in the community.

Community Benefits

- The Covenant area forest is a key element of the identity of the Covenant community and contributes to the sense of pride residents have in the community.

Health Benefits

- Trees contribute to the sense of physical, mental and social well-being of people of every age in the community.

Economic Benefits

- Trees significantly enhance property values. Trees planted on private property increase a home's value by a minimum of 10% and up to 20% of the value the property would have

without these trees, according to studies (McPherson 2012 and Wolf 2007). That equates to an average of \$300,000-\$600,000 in value added per property in the Rancho Santa Fe Covenant area based on an average sale price of \$3,014,701 from June 2015 to June 2017.

Energy Conservation Benefits

- Trees reduce the “urban heat-island effect” by cooling everything, including the soil, pavement and buildings. Trees provide shade, moisture and windbreaks, decreasing the amount of energy needed to cool and heat our homes and offices.
- Trees lower local air temperatures by shading asphalt, concrete surfaces and bare dirt. Leaves on trees cool the air by drawing moisture from the soil and evaporating water through their leaves into the air.

TREE SAN DIEGO -- Key Recommendations:

Advocacy and Strategic Management: The Association’s existing volunteer forest health advocacy and advisory group, the Forest Health and Preservation Committee, should continue to oversee implementation of appropriate actions from the Forest Health Study. In addition, it should be an ongoing monitor of Covenant area forest health and make recommendations for additional steps required to assure a high level of forest health in the future.

Stewardship: The Association should actively support (but not be wholly responsible for) the formation of a corps of Covenant area volunteers (“tree stewards”) who are trained in various tree-related and community organizing skills. These tree stewards would volunteer their time to assist private property owners in assuring the continued health of the Covenant forest over a period of many years.

Community Education and Motivation: The Association should lead an ongoing effort within the Covenant area to educate existing and new community members on the health of its forest and to motivate community members to take appropriate action to ensure its continuing health.

Dead Trees: The Association should continue to work with the local Fire Protection District to encourage community members to immediately remove dead trees on their private properties.

Planting New Trees: The Association should encourage community members to plant “the right trees in the right places” on their individual private properties now and as needed in the years ahead. Trees planted in our community today will be the forest of the future. **Plant our Future!**

Executive Summary -- DUDEK Portion of the Study

Planning for long term urban forestry sustainability requires a basic understanding of the forest’s current condition so that future goals can be established and priority concerns can be addressed.

Covenant area Forest Composition:

Table 1 includes a summary of the Covenant area Forest Types, their estimated tree totals and overall forest tree population.

Table 1
Rancho Santa Fe Covenant Area Forest Type Tree Population Estimates

Forest Type	Estimated Tree Population*
Residential Forest	163,700
Eucalyptus Forest	56,500
Agriforest (Orchards)	34,700
Southern Riparian Scrub	4,000
Forests-Miscellaneous	3,000
Golf Course	2,100
RSF Village Forest	1,900
Southern Sycamore-Alder Riparian Woodland	100
Non-Forest	0
Total	266,000

*Tree population includes RSF Covenant area trees in the Forest types presented, including trees on RSF Association and private property.

Over 224,000 of the estimated 266,000 Covenant area forest trees are in “fair” or “good” condition. Trees in the fair or good condition categories are considered valuable, benefit-producing trees. 42,000 trees are rated as “poor” or “dead”.

DUDEK – Key Recommendations:

Eucalyptus Tree Management Program and Fire Safety. A coordinated effort to address dead trees within the Eucalyptus Forest Type and the Residential Forest Type is considered a high priority.

Dead trees do not increase the probability of a fire but they will contribute to the spread and intensity of a fire. Removing dead trees on a timely basis is important to the fire safety of the community.

Establishing and Achieving Health Condition Goals. The high number of poor (declining) trees within the Covenant area forest, particularly the Eucalyptus Forest and Residential Forest types, should be addressed as a priority for improving the overall condition of and benefits provided by the community’s trees.

Per Capita Tree Population. The Covenant currently enjoys a very high number of trees for each resident. The current 85 trees per person is a good goal to maintain, even with large scale tree removals that are recommended. In order to maintain this level, new areas will need to be planted with trees because, due to overcrowding, the Eucalyptus Forest areas will not be able to sustain the current number of trees in healthy conditions.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

Learn more about what you can do for your property, your neighborhood and your community!

Contact the Rancho Santa Fe Association's "Forest Health and Preservation Committee" at 858-756-1174 or RSFA@rsfassociation.org

YOUR INVOLVEMENT WILL BE WELCOMED!