

CALIFORNIA STATE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Land Use

Information for Landowners

Public Lands Committee

November 18, 2014



To help those who are considering having apiaries on their land to know what to expect, and to gain a basic understanding of what honey bees can do for them.

Contents

Who is the CSBA?	3
What is an apiary?	3
What do beekeepers look for?	4
How do honey bees affect other pollinators?	4
Conduct of beekeepers	4
Regulations.....	5
Liability	5
Landowner Benefits	5
How to act around bees.....	6
What to do if you should get stung:	7
Feeding bees, feeds America	7
How are we doing?	8
Contact us.	8

Who is the CSBA?

The purpose of the California State Beekeepers Association is to educate the public about the beneficial aspects of honey bees, advance research beneficial to beekeeping practices, provide a forum for cooperation among beekeepers, and to support the economic and political viability of the beekeeping industry.

What is an apiary?

An apiary is where bees are kept, a bee yard. There are a few differences in apiaries depending on the size of the beekeeping operation. Beekeeping operations vary from small scale, where hives are hand loaded, to larger operations that utilize flatbed trucks and forklifts.

Commercial beekeepers are looking for locations consisting of a quarter acre or more of relatively flat land that is accessible by a truck with a trailer. This area can physically hold about 100 colonies of bees on pallets (typically 4 colonies to a pallet), with enough extra room to load and unload hives with the forklift. The apiary and surrounding area are usually cleared to act as a fire break around the hives.

Access to the apiary is important. Steep narrow roads are difficult to negotiate, particularly in wet conditions and therefore less desirable. Beekeepers need access at night to move hives, and during the day to work the colonies. A locked gate is preferred to discourage vandalism and theft.

A source of water is important. If none is available nearby, the beekeeper may supply water. Providing a source of water minimizes the (generally minor) nuisance of bees gathering water on neighboring properties.

Beekeepers inspection of their hives is done as needed, often once every few weeks, depending on weather and forage availability. Inspections take a few minutes or longer. These inspections are to assess forage conditions, monitor the health of the colonies, provide supplemental feed if necessary, and add additional boxes (supers) for the colony to use. Beekeepers pay close attention to the bloom cycles of plants in surrounding areas to gauge the number of colonies an area can support (the carrying capacity of the apiary at that time of year).

A “bee smoker” is an essential tool of beekeeping. It is a metal can with a nozzle at the top and attached to a bellows that blows cool smoke through the chamber holding a smoldering smoker fuel. A hive tool and veil are other essential beekeeping implements. The typical white bee suits and bee gloves are used to keep plant resins and other sticky materials

off regular clothing. However, blue jeans and T-shirts often are the chosen “bee suit” of many beekeepers.

What are beekeepers looking for?

Beekeepers tend to be in and out of apiaries without attracting much attention. Apiary visits are generally quick and efficient. In order to best do our job, we look for:

- Access to clean and safe forage areas
- Access roads with minimal grades
- Semi flat section of land
- Room to off load and load a truck
- A place to turn a truck around
- Daytime access to work the bees
- Nighttime access to move bees in or out
- A location secured by a gate is preferred
- An alert landlord who notices unexpected activities in the apiary and contacts the beekeeper is very helpful
- A fire break around apiary

How do honey bees affect other pollinators?

Honey bees were brought to America from Europe in 1622, and introduced to California during the Gold Rush. They have been coexisting with our native bees for almost 400 years. Honey bees have not been an invasive species, but instead work side by side with native pollinators. In fact, honey bees are the most important pollinators in the food chain because they are easily moved and managed.

Commercial beekeepers oversee the large numbers of colonies necessary to pollinate the majority of fruit, nut, and vegetable crops. They also pollinate seed crops, like alfalfa and cotton, which feed other livestock and keep people clothed. Much of California agricultural production is partially or completely dependent upon managed honey bee colonies.

What to expect when working with beekeepers.

CSBA members are good stewards of the land and are conscience of the needs of landowners. Commercial beekeepers usually:

- Carry general liability insurance
- Compensate for use

- Report to the landowner immediately if something seems out of place
- ALWAYS leave a gate EXACTLY as it was found
- Always clean up any refuse
- Leave only footprints when they leave
- Use caution with vehicles operated around grasses and weeds
- Stay on roads
- Remain apprised of IPM programs and anticipated pesticide applications
- Return soil and streambeds to original condition, if disturbed

Regulations

Every county has its own set of regulations and requirements. Some common considerations are:

- Marked Hives
- Proximity to roads and property lines
- Registration of apiary
- Fire prevention

Liability

Beekeepers have insurances that vary in scope. In general they are policies that are specific to beekeeping operations. The policies have an express understanding of the risk and exposure involved in beekeeping. They often include:

- Gen Liability coverage \$1-2 million
- Workmen's comp
- Personal damages
- Property damage
- Addition of landowner as "additionally insured"

Landowner Benefits

- Bees help beneficial plants propagate
- Increased pollination of flowering plants and crops results in bigger fruits, nuts, vegetables, and native plants
- Increased forage helps support, protect, and sustain healthy honey bee colonies and native bees
- Increased food source for livestock

- Improved soil fertility
- Help fulfill reclamation contracts sooner
- Managed honey bee colonies mitigate the influx of Africanized Honey Bees
- Bee hives can be an excellent deterrent to potential trespassers
- Beekeepers are good stewards of the land, looking out for unauthorized entry
- Participation in promoting the welfare of honey bees, our food source, and the wellbeing of Earth. Bees are critical for the pollination of most flowering plants, including native species
- Increased pollination results higher seed set
- An abundance of plants increases habitat and food sources for native wildlife
- Bee-pollinated plants promote better water infiltration and improve soil fertility
- Honey bee pollination of forage legumes improves nitrogen fixation in pastureland
- Bee pollination of clovers helps with the seed set of these introduced forage plants
- Copious seeds from bee pollination contribute to plant growth for erosion control and re-establishment of recently burned-over areas
- Bees and beekeepers leave a "green footprint" benefiting the environment wherever they go
- Provides opportunities to assist beekeepers in their efforts to successfully sustain an animal of extreme value to food and fiber production in America

How to act around bees

Bees only sting when they are adequately stimulated to respond with defensive behavior. It is rare to be stung by a bee if you are out of the line of sight of the hive. Bees at flowers or water are completely uninterested in humans or livestock, and not the least bit aggressive. They are simply going about their business of gathering food and water for their colony. Leave them be and they will not bother you. A bee landing on you is not prone to sting. Train your mind to look before you swat. If it is a honey bee, she will usually fly off in a few seconds or you may gently flick her off.

On the other hand, bees will protect and defend their hives. Therefore, it is best to keep about 100 feet away from the actual apiary. Incoming or outgoing bees may inadvertently get caught in your hair, or the occasional over-exuberant guard bee may see you as an aggressor and try to drive you off. A bee that gets caught in your hair and starts emitting a loud buzz will sting you unless you immediately crush it with your fingers. Never flip such a bee out of your hair, or it will likely sting you in the face! Pinch it quickly, cover the spot with your hand to trap the alarm pheromone, and get away from the apiary at once!

Bees will not sting *en masse* unless you are immediately adjacent to disturbed hives. If bees start to chase you, put your head down and run away from the hives (or get into your vehicle). Looking for shrubbery to run into, to lose following bees, can work as well.

The main thing to remember is that **BEES ONLY STING IF THEY ARE DISTURBED CLOSE TO THE HIVE**. If you can't see the hives, then the bees usually won't bother you.

Bees collect water, especially on hot days, from anywhere they can find it. Bees especially like wet grass. That being the case, bare feet in wet grass is a bad combination. If you step on a bee she will sting you. In the event a honey bee accidentally flies up a loose piece of clothing she may get pinched between you and your clothing resulting in a sting. Give the honey bee plenty of space and allow it to fly out to light.

What to do if you should get stung:

Life-threatening sting allergy is extremely rare; however, you should be aware of the possibility. **IF YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTIES BREATHING OR FEEL A TIGHTNING IN YOUR THROAT OR CHEST CALL 911 OR GET TO A HOSPITAL AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.**

If you are stung by a honey bee there will be a stinger with an attached venom sack lodged in your skin. Immediately remove the stinger by scratching it out with your finger nail. Remove it quickly to reduce the amount of venom injected. A sting will generally hurt for only a minute or two, so try to relax. Swelling in the area of the sting is normal and can last a few hours or a day. Fingers and faces swell the most. A pressure bandage may help to reduce your body's reaction to the sting.

When a bee stings, a scent is released which makes the area a potential target for more stings; get away from the hives ASAP.

In practice, most landowners do not experience any problems with stinging, so long as they do not walk directly into the bee yard.

Feeding bees, feeds America

Changes in agricultural practices are making it harder and harder for beekeepers to find "safe" (i.e. pesticide free) pastures upon which their bees can forage when not actually pollinating specific crops. Bees are currently struggling with introduced parasites and viruses, and need all the help they can get. Providing bees with nutritious forage goes a long way toward helping them stay healthy.

As a landowner, you have the opportunity to provide pastureland to the benefit of honey bees (and their keepers). By working with a beekeeper, you can help them to maintain the critical supply of honey bees upon which California's agricultural production is dependent. In a very real way you can help to make the world a better place.

BEE the change!

How are we doing?

The CSBA is interested in keeping this document up to date. After your experience with an apiary on your land it would be helpful to have your input:

- What other information would you find useful?
- Was any of our information inaccurate?

You can email us at:

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