



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 19-820

Board Meeting Date: 8/6/2019

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Peggy Jensen, Interim Parks Director

Subject: Letter of Support for the California Vegetation Treatment Program's Draft Program Environmental Impact Report

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution authorizing the President of the Board of Supervisors to sign the proposed Letter of Support regarding the California Vegetation Treatment Program's Draft Program Environmental Impact Report.

BACKGROUND:

Vegetation overgrowth and the effects of climate change have contributed to a dangerous alteration in California's wildfire season. To mitigate the resulting wildfire threats to vulnerable communities, many land management agencies are working to reduce fire fuels and restore and preserve critical habitat. The Department is working to achieve these objectives by, among other things, partnering with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection ("CAL FIRE") to maintain and create shaded fuel breaks, dedicating greater financial resources to stewardship activities, and offering additional training opportunities so staff can implement more fuel reduction and habitat restoration projects. Because a significant amount of work is required to reduce wildfire threats, greater efficiencies in the project implementation process are needed.

The objective of the California Vegetation Treatment Program ("CalVTP") is to reduce wildfire risks through the use of authorized vegetation treatment activities. These activities can be implemented by CAL FIRE, public agencies and organizations funded by CAL FIRE grants, or public agencies that own or manage qualified lands. Treatment is only able to occur after the project has gone through an environmental review process.

While the primary benefit of the CalVTP is the authority it grants CAL FIRE to treat up to 250,000 acres annually, another advantage is the streamlining of vegetation management activities for eligible local agencies. Should an eligible local agency want to complete a fuel reduction and/or habitat restoration project within a qualified area and the activities and potential impacts are determined to

be within the scope of the CalVTP and the Program Environmental Impact Report prepared for the CalVTP (“PEIR”), the local agency could rely on the analysis in the PEIR to satisfy the environmental review requirements imposed under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”). Should the components of the proposed project not be within the scope of the PEIR, additional environmental review by the local agency would be required.

DISCUSSION:

The PEIR for the CalVTP would facilitate a streamlined assessment of fuel reduction and habitat restoration projects in qualified areas. For the county’s park system, this includes all or a majority of the following properties: Quarry Park, San Bruno Mountain, Crystal Springs Regional Trail, Huddart Park, Wunderlich Park, Sam McDonald Park, and Memorial Park. A limited portion of Pescadero Creek Park would also qualify.

As detailed in the proposed Letter of Support, which is attached as Exhibit A, the CalVTP and associated PEIR, if adopted, would assist the Department in reducing the threat of wildfire to the County’s most vulnerable communities by reducing fuels within the wildland-urban interface, establishing fuel breaks, and implementing ecological restoration projects using manual, mechanical, and chemical treatment approaches.

The PEIR also supports the completion of projects that would significantly improve the ecological value of habitat within County Parks. Through the reduction of fuel loads in eligible areas, the County can mimic the historic and natural disturbance wildfires create and reduce competition for resources within the ecosystem. This, in turn, enhances the health of mature trees and vegetation, benefiting both the wildlife and the habitats they are dependent on.

Approval of this actions contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of an Environmental Conscious Community by supporting projects that reduce fuel loads and enhance habitat within County parks.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No Net County Cost.