

Chapter 1

Introduction

The City of Oakland (City) has developed a Draft Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) that describes the actions that the Oakland Fire Department (OFD) would continue to take over the plan's 10-year timeframe to reduce fire hazard on 1,924 acres of City-owned land and along 308 miles of roadways in the City's designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). The VMP has been developed to meet the City's stated goals of reducing wildfire hazard on City-owned land and along critical access/egress routes, reducing the likelihood of ignitions and extreme fire behavior to enhance public and firefighter safety, avoiding or minimizing impacts to natural resources, and contributing to regional efforts to reduce wildfire hazard in the Oakland Hills.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires all state and local government agencies to consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority before approving or carrying out those projects. As the lead agency for the VMP project under CEQA, the City has prepared this Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) to provide the public, responsible agencies, and trustee agencies with information about the potential environmental effects of implementing the Draft VMP. This DEIR was prepared in compliance with the requirements of CEQA (as amended) and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [Cal. Code Regs.], tit. 14, Section 15000 et seq.).

This DEIR describes and summarizes the proposed actions of the VMP in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, and the environmental resource sections of Chapter 3. More detail is provided in the Draft VMP, which is provided in its entirety in **Appendix A, Draft Vegetation Management Plan**, of this DEIR.

1.1 OAKLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Oakland Fire Department (OFD) has been actively managing vegetation on City-owned property since 2003 to minimize wildfire hazard in the VMP area, utilizing various techniques including grazing, hand crews, and limited mechanical treatments. Goats have been used in large treatment areas, on City park land and open space (e.g., King Estate Open Space Park, Joaquin Miller Park, Knowland Park, Sheffield Village Open Space, Shepherd Canyon, and London Road) where manual labor is cost-prohibitive or areas are inaccessible to mowing equipment or too steep for hand crews. OFD has historically used hand labor to manage vegetation on urban and residential parcels, roadsides, and small treatment areas within larger parks or open space areas. Mechanical equipment has also been used on an as-needed basis typically to grade or disk fire trails, reduce ladder fuels (e.g., removing small trees), control highly flammable/rapidly spreading species, reduce surface fuels (e.g., mowing grasses), chip and spread trimmings and down material, thin vegetation, and maintain reduced or target fuel loads.

Between 2004 and 2017, OFD conducted vegetation management activities throughout the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD), a City-funded special assessment district that coincides with the City's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). This district financed the costs and expenses related to vegetation management, yard waste disposal, wildfire prevention education, and fire patrols in the Oakland Hills. The WPAD was disbanded in June 2017 due to funding constraints. Although OFD has continued to conduct vegetation management activities on City-owned properties and along roads since 2017, these activities have been conducted to a lesser degree than when the WPAD was in place.

1.2 PLAN BACKGROUND

The Oakland Hills is the location of one of the state's most destructive historic wildfires, the 1991 Tunnel Fire, which destroyed 2,900 structures, injured more than 150 people, and killed 25 people. The Oakland Hills represents a complex wildfire environment that presents a significant risk to public and firefighter safety and to the built and natural environment due to local extreme wind and weather conditions (including Diablo wind events), steep and varied terrain, and a wide range of different vegetation types. Of the variables that comprise the wildland fire environment (weather, terrain, and fuels or vegetation), vegetation is the only variable that can be managed. Lessons learned from the 1991 Tunnel Fire and other more recent, devastating wildfires in Northern California highlight the importance of managing vegetation to reduce wildfire hazard.

Many jurisdictions in the region have developed management plans and programs to improve vegetation management, reduce fire fuel loads, and minimize wildfire hazard. These efforts include the City's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan; plans developed by the WPAD; and management plans and environmental documents prepared by Chabot Space and Science Center, East Bay Regional Park District, University of California at Berkeley, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alameda County, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection/Santa Clara Unit, and Federal Emergency Management Agency, among others. The City, in close coordination with OFD, regional partners described above, and a broad range of stakeholder groups, developed the VMP to reduce fire hazards on City-owned land and critical access/egress routes in City-designated VHFHSZ areas, reduce the likelihood of ignitions and extreme fire behavior to enhance public and firefighter safety, avoid or minimize impacts to natural resources, and contribute to regional efforts to reduce wildfire hazard in the Oakland Hills. The Draft VMP (provided in Appendix A) includes descriptions of City-owned parcels and roadsides located within the City's VHFHSZ, natural resources at these locations, vegetation management techniques to reduce fire hazards, maintenance standards for the different types of treatment areas, and practices to avoid and minimize potential environmental impacts when conducting vegetation management work.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF CEQA REQUIREMENTS

As described in Public Resources Code Section 21000, CEQA has several basic purposes:

- Inform governmental decision makers and the public about the potential significant environmental effects of proposed activities.
- Identify the ways in which environmental damage can be avoided or substantially reduced.
- Prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring implementation of feasible mitigation measures or project alternatives that would substantially lessen any significant effects that a project would have on the environment.
- Disclose to the public the reasons why a governmental agency approved a project in the manner the agency chose if significant environmental effects are involved.

With certain, strictly limited exceptions, CEQA requires all state and local government agencies to consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority before approving or carrying out those projects. CEQA establishes procedural and substantive requirements that agencies must satisfy to meet CEQA's objectives. For example, the agency with principal responsibility for approving or carrying out a project (the lead agency) must first assess whether a proposed project would result in significant environmental impacts. If there is substantial evidence that the project would result in significant environmental impacts, CEQA requires that the agency prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) analyzing both the proposed project and a reasonable range of potentially feasible alternatives. The VMP is the project for this CEQA analysis and the City is the lead agency under CEQA.

As described in the CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, Section 15121, subd. [a]), an EIR is an informational document that assesses potential environmental effects of a proposed project and identifies mitigation measures and alternatives to the project that could reduce or avoid potentially significant environmental impacts. Other key CEQA requirements include developing a plan to implement and monitor the success of the identified mitigation measures and carrying out specific public notice and distribution steps to facilitate public involvement in the environmental review process. As an informational document used in the planning and decision-making process, an EIR's purpose is not to recommend either approval or denial of a project. Note that an EIR does not expand or otherwise provide independent authority for the lead agency to impose mitigation measures or avoid project-related significant environmental impacts beyond the authority already within the lead agency's jurisdiction.

1.4 SCOPE AND INTENT OF THIS DOCUMENT

The City is the lead agency for the CEQA process and has discretionary review and approval authority for project activities that are subject to CEQA (CEQA Guidelines Section 15378). The City will use the analyses presented in this DEIR, and the public response to them, to evaluate the proposed program's environmental impacts. The City of Oakland Planning Commission will be responsible for considering the potential certification of this DEIR.

The intent of this DEIR is to evaluate in detail the vegetation management activities to be conducted under the VMP. The analysis in the DEIR has been prepared at a project level in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15161. Accordingly, this DEIR focuses on the changes in the environment that could result during all phases of the project, including maintenance planning and implementation, such that the DEIR adequately satisfies all CEQA requirements to support project implementation without the need for further CEQA documentation.

1.5 CEQA PROCESS

The following discussion explains the steps in the CEQA process.

1.5.1 Notice of Preparation

A Notice of Preparation of an EIR (NOP) for the VMP was prepared in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (CEQA Guidelines Section 15082) and was circulated to the Office of Planning and Research's State Clearinghouse on November 1, 2019. The original scoping period started on November 1, 2019 for 31 days, ending on December 2, 2019. However, the scoping period was extended to December 12, 2019, to allow the public and interested parties additional time to comment on the scope of the DEIR and to correct the contact name and email address of Angela Robinson Piñon, the person receiving comments during the scoping period. Thus, the scoping period extended for a total of 41 days. The NOP presented general background information on the VMP, the scoping process, and the environmental issues to be addressed in the DEIR. Copies of the NOP were distributed by mail and email to a broad range of stakeholders, including state, federal, and local regulatory agencies and jurisdictions, utilities, and interested individuals in the area. In addition, the NOP was published on the City's website (oaklandca.gov/documents/oakland-vegetation-management-plan-comment-period-extension). The NOP is included in this DEIR in **Appendix B, Scoping Summary**.

1.5.2 Scoping Comments and Meeting

As described in more detail in Section 2.2.2, several public and stakeholder engagement meetings were conducted to support development of the VMP. Six workshops/meetings were conducted in 2017 and 2018 during development of the Draft VMP. In addition to the public meetings, a number of additional phone calls, meetings, and on-site field meetings were held with stakeholders interested in the VMP to collect additional public input. The Oakland City Council, Public Safety Committee further directed the VMP development team to conduct additional outreach to park volunteer/stewardship groups to receive information on current activities being conducted in City parks that occur in the VMP area with the intent of incorporating volunteer/stakeholder input into annual vegetation management planning efforts described in the VMP. In total, 11 additional group meetings were held in spring 2019 with stakeholders interested in the VMP.

To provide the public, as well as responsible and trustee agencies, an opportunity to ask questions and submit comments on the VMP and the scope of the DEIR, the City held a public scoping meeting during the public scoping period. As described above, notices of the meeting were mailed to interested parties; in addition, scoping meeting information was published

on the City's website prior to the event (oaklandca.gov/projects/oakland-vegetation-management-plan).

The scoping meeting was held before the Oakland Planning Commission on Wednesday, November 20, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. at Oakland City Hall, 1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Oakland.

The City also presented an update on the VMP and DEIR as an item to the Oakland City Council, Public Safety Committee on Tuesday, December 3, 2019.

The City accepted verbal and written comments at the scoping meeting and the Public Safety Committee meeting, and accepted both written and electronic comments (via email) during the 41-day scoping period. During the scoping period, 41 comment letters were received. These comments were considered in this CEQA evaluation and are summarized in **Appendix B**.

1.5.3 DEIR Distribution and Meeting

The City has prepared this DEIR, as informed by public and agency input received during the scoping period, to disclose environmental impacts associated with the VMP. Where any such impacts are significant, feasible mitigation measures and potentially feasible alternatives that would substantially lessen or avoid such effects are identified and discussed. The public review period allows the public an opportunity to provide input to the lead agency on the DEIR.

The DEIR is currently undergoing public review for 45 days. During this period, the City will hold one public meeting to receive comments on the DEIR on December 16, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. The meeting will occur during the City of Oakland Planning Commission meeting and will be hosted on Zoom. For links to the meeting, please visit: <https://www.oaklandca.gov/boards-commissions/planning-commission/meetings>. The meeting will begin with a brief overview of the proposed project and the analysis and conclusions set forth in the DEIR. The introductory presentation will be followed by the opportunity for interested members of the public to provide comments to the City regarding the VMP and the DEIR. Commenters may provide oral comments at the meeting.

1.5.4 Certification of the Final EIR

Once the public review period is closed, the City will prepare a Final EIR (FEIR). The FEIR will incorporate this DEIR by reference. It will contain all comments submitted on this DEIR (including those made at public meetings), responses to those comments, and any revisions to the text of this DEIR. The FEIR will be reviewed by the City of Oakland Planning Commission and considered for approval by the City Council.

Written/mailed and oral comments received in response to the DEIR will be addressed in the "Responses to Comments" section of the FEIR. Together with the DEIR and any related changes to the substantive discussion in the DEIR, these responses will constitute the FEIR. The FEIR, in turn, will inform the City's exercise of its discretion as a lead agency under CEQA in deciding whether or how to approve the VMP.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THIS DEIR

This DEIR contains the following components:

Executive Summary. A summary of the VMP, the issues of concern, project alternatives, environmental impacts, and mitigation measures are provided in this chapter.

Chapter 1, Introduction. This chapter describes the purpose and organization of the DEIR and its preparation, review, and certification process.

Chapter 2, Project Description. This chapter summarizes the VMP, including a description of the background and development process, VMP Area, purpose and objectives, proposed actions that would be taken under the VMP, and related permits and approvals associated with implementing the VMP.

Chapter 3, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures. This chapter contains an introduction to the impact analysis conducted in this DEIR and identifies resource topic areas determined not to be affected by the VMP (Section 3.1). Sections 3.2 through 3.14 describe the environmental resources and potential environmental impacts of the VMP. Each of these sections describes the existing setting and background information for the particular resource topic. The purpose of providing this background is to give the reader an understanding of the resources that could be affected by the VMP. Each of these resource sections includes a discussion of the criteria used to determine the significance levels of the VMP's potential impacts. Each section also provides mitigation measures to reduce, where possible, any adverse effects from potentially significant impacts.

Chapter 4, Other Statutory Considerations. This chapter addresses the VMP's potential to have growth-inducing impacts or contribute to cumulative impacts, defined as the incremental impact of the VMP when added to other related impacts of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. Any impacts identified as significant and unavoidable are listed in this chapter.

Chapter 5, Alternatives. This chapter describes the process by which alternatives to the VMP were developed and screened. It also evaluates likely environmental impacts of the potential alternatives and identifies the environmentally superior alternative.

Chapter 6, References. This chapter provides a bibliography of printed references, websites, and personal communications used in preparing this DEIR.

Chapter 7, Report Preparation. This chapter identifies staff from the City of Oakland, OFD, Horizon Water and Environment, and Dudek who assisted in preparing this DEIR.

Appendices

- Appendix A, *Draft Vegetation Management Plan*
- Appendix B, *Scoping Summary*

- Appendix C, *Air Quality/Greenhouse Gas/Energy Calculations*
- Appendix D, *Biological Resources Information*
- Appendix E, *Cultural Resources Record Search Information*
- Appendix F, *Noise and Vibration*
- Appendix G, *Tribal Cultural Resources*

1.7 SUBMITTAL OF COMMENTS

The City is circulating this DEIR for a 45-day public review and the comment period will end on January 7, 2021. As discussed above, the City will host one public meeting during this period at which oral comments will be received. The meeting will be on December 16, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. and occur during the City of Oakland Planning Commission meeting. The meeting will be hosted on Zoom. For links to the meeting, please visit: www.oaklandca.gov/boards-commissions/planning-commission/meetings. The purpose of public circulation and the public meeting is to provide agencies and interested individuals with opportunities to comment on or express concerns regarding the contents of this DEIR.

Oral comments concerning this DEIR can be submitted at the public meeting described above or written/mailed comments may be submitted to DEIR-comments@oaklandvegmanagement.org at any time during the DEIR public review period. All comments must be received by 5:00 p.m. on January 7, 2021 and directed to the name and address listed below:

Contact Name: Ken Schwarz

Address: Horizon Water and Environment
266 Grand Avenue, Suite 210
Oakland, CA 94610

Phone Number: (510) 986-1851

Email: DEIR-comments@oaklandvegmanagement.org

Submittal of written comments by e-mail (Microsoft Word or portable document format [PDF]) would be greatly appreciated. Written comments received in response to this DEIR during the public review period will be addressed in the “Responses to Comments” section of the FEIR.

All documents mentioned herein or related to this project can be reviewed online at the City’s website (www.oaklandca.gov/projects/oakland-vegetation-management-plan).

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