



DATE: June 12, 2009

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Pat O'Brien, General Manager

SUBJECT: Background Information for the June 25, 2009 Board Executive Committee Meeting

I. Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan (Redwood Regional Park)

David Amme, Wildland Vegetation Program Manager, will make a presentation on this agenda item.

BACKGROUND

The Redwood Park Serpentine Prairie ("Serpentine Prairie") is one of the most diverse native grasslands in the San Francisco Bay Area. Of the 230 plant species recorded in the Serpentine Prairie, 165 species (75%) are native. This Serpentine Prairie has the largest population of a state and federally listed species-the Presidio clarkia (Clarkia franciscana)-in the East Bay, and may also have the greatest concentration of native grass species for any individual site this size in the state. The endangered Alameda whipsnake is known to also inhabit the Serpentine Prairie. The Park District was requested to prepare a plan of management actions to restore the Serpentine Prairie by the California Native Plant Society via a petition delivered to the Park District in late 2006. The Board Operations Committee held a meeting in September 2006 at which concerns of the recreational impacts on the Serpentine Prairie were addressed. Because of the protected species and sensitivity of the site, the Park District was required to prepare a restoration plan and a CEQA document by the California Department of Fish and Game ("CDFG"), which is accompanied by a CDFG permit.

The Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan ("Plan") (see Attachment A) describes procedures for actively managing approximately 27 acres of the project site for the enhancement of Presidio clarkia. The purpose of the Plan is to: 1) restore the vitality and botanical diversity of the Serpentine Prairie; 2) manage the site to ensure survival of special status species associated with the Serpentine Prairie; and 3) provide for the enjoyment and appreciation of park users.

Proposed Management Actions

Current management actions include: 1) the removal of exotic and native mature and sapling trees that constitute a threat to the habitat; 2) the installation of a resource protection fence around the perimeter of Hunt Field to prevent access of people and pets to a severely impacted area; 3) remediation of existing informal trails and minor construction of new access trails around the fenced area; and 4) public outreach and education, and the installation of interpretive signage. The Plan uses

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an adaptive management model, making adjustments or changes based on physical responses to restoration treatments and impacts determined by monitoring the project site. The work will be monitored closely and include science-based experimental treatments to encourage the spread of native forbs at the expense of introduced competitive annual grasses. Future activities that may be tested as part of the adaptive management program may include additional protection fencing, prescribed fire, and a seasonal sheep grazing program.

Potential Environmental Effects

The proposed project would involve restoration and management activities in and near sensitive habitats that contain a diverse array of sensitive plant and wildlife species. Short-term impacts would include the removal of trees not endemic to the Serpentine Prairie, and the limited use of herbicide to prevent re-sprouting of hardwoods and restrictions on recreational access in the immediate area.

Over the long term, the resource management strategies included in the Plan are intended to result in beneficial effects on the habitat of plant and wildlife species, populations, and communities including special-status species such as the endangered Presidio clarkia and Alameda whipsnake habitat. The proposed project would not alter the historic tradition of equestrian use previously documented by the Park District in this area, as the area's trails and equestrian arena would be retained. The project would, however, alter current recreational activities by fencing off portions of the Hunt Field to limit recreational over-use impacts. However, alternate trail access would continue to be available throughout, both in this area and throughout Redwood Regional Park.

Public Review Period and Response to Comments

In accordance with CEQA section 15072, an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (see Attachment B) was submitted to the State Clearinghouse, and a public notice of intent to adopt a Negative Declaration was posted at the park and on the District's web site and was distributed to local agencies, neighbors, and community organizations. The 30-day review period commenced May 1, 2009 and ended June 3, 2009. During this period the Park District held one public information meeting on May 11, 2009 and two interpretive field walks--one on May 17, 2009 and one on June 13, 2009.

No state agencies submitted comments. The California Native Plant Society submitted a letter supporting the plan and acknowledging the adequacy of the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration. Twenty-two public comments were received. The majority of these comments were submitted by equestrians concerned that: a) their access to the park trails would be curtailed; and b) that conflicts between equestrians would increase due to the installation of the protective fencing and the "funneling of users in and around the arena."

During the public review period Park District staff met with the equestrians and agreed to: a) increase regulatory and educational signage within the prairie area warning dog walkers to leash dogs; b) move the protective fencing further away from the equestrian arena to create a wider trail corridor for passage and informal seating; and c) install a pass through gate at the top of the prairie at the southern end of the interpretive trail to remind park visitors that they are entering an equestrian zone and to use caution.

Other comments dealt with: a) air quality relative to the release of carbons when the trees are removed and during periods of prescribed burns; b) biological resources regarding the loss of trees and

value of native serpentine prairie habitat over other plant communities now occurring on the prairie; and c) hazards associated with prescribed burns and use of herbicides.

Staff is working on a formal response to questions on these concerns. Copies of the State Clearinghouse and California Native Plant Society letters and the community responses to the Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration are attached as Attachment C.

Project Schedule

The project implementation will be done in phases over the next four years. Tree cutting work will be done in mid-summer to early fall 2009 (July-September) when the ground is dry and hard and the annual Presidio clarkia seed has already been dispersed. In the current first phase, which will be implemented in the summer of 2009, trees will be cut in key areas that will allow the construction of a new entrance path and interpretive overlook path, and the construction of the Hunt Field protection fence. Baseline surveys and protocols have already been established as a basis for monitoring the effects of the restoration program, including the testing of vegetation manipulation (timed mowing, thatch removal, etc.) designed to enhance native plant species diversity and richness.

Project Funding

Currently there are three sources of funds available for implementing the Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan:

General Fund (7440)	\$25,000 for fencing (Redwood)
Resource Enhancement Project (7440)	\$25,000
FEMA Fund	<u>\$25,000</u> for tree removal
Total	\$75,000

In addition, there is \$25,865 of General Fund monies in a Habitat Protection District-Wide capital account (Wildland Vegetation Dept.) that is available for the Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan.

Cost Estimates for 2009 work

The anticipated cost for work in 2009:

Tree removal (Phase I)	\$25,000
Protection Fence	\$25,000
Monitoring	\$17,700 (Wildland Vegetation Dept. 7440 funds)
Whipsnake monitoring	~ \$ 5,000
Align new trail	\$15,000 (Operations funded)
Soil pile removal	<u>\$ 5,000</u> (Operations funded)
Total	~\$92,700

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board Executive Committee forward its recommendation to certify the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the *Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan* and adopt the *Serpentine Prairie Restoration Plan*.