

Summary of Meeting #4

Wildfire Hazard Assessment, Potential Treatment Areas, Vegetation Types, Fuel Reduction treatments and Resource Considerations

May 7, 2008

Prepared by Cheryl Miller, Amphion

Attendees

Jerry Baer, HCN
Margo Bennett, UC Berkeley
Edward Bennett
William Berry
Suzanne Berry
Michael Bond, El Cerrito FD
Geoffrey Carter
Afton Crooks, Sierra Club
Joanne Drabek
Joe Engbeck
Robert Erickson, Contra Costa Fire PD
Bill Gilbert
Marilyn Goldharber
Morgan Griffin
Dan Grissetti
Martin Holden, Claremont Conservancy
Lyn Hovland, HCN
Jerry Kent
Tom Klatt, UC Berkeley
Bill McClung
Mary Millman
Lech Navmovich
Gordon Piper
Carol Pranka, Diablo Firesafe Council
Peter Rauch, CNPS
Margit Roos-Collins
Peter Scott
Jean Thomas
Tim Wallace
Allene Warren
Trudy Washburn

EBRPD

Mike Anderson, Assistant General Manager
Dave Collins, Assistant General Manager
Brian Wiese, Chief Planning/Stewardship/GIS Services
Ken Blonski, Fire Chief
Joe DiDonato, Stewardship Manager
Ed Leong, Park Supervisor
Jessica Sheppard, Resource Analyst
John Swanson, Assistant Fire Chief

Consultant Team

Judy Malamut, Principal and Project Manager LSA
Malcolm Sproul, Principal LSA
Cheryl Miller, Process Coordinator, Amphion
Carol Rice, Wildland Resource Management
Richard Nichols, Biological Resource Mgr LSA
Amy Paulsen, Project Planner LSA

Purpose and Overview of Meeting. Brian Wiese welcomed participants and provided an overview of the planning effort.

Overview of Project. Judy Malamut provided a discussion of the background for the project, goals and work program. She outlined the development of the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan (WHR RMP) and the current focus of the evening presentation as a scoping session for the EIR.

Overview of Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan. Judy Malamut provided an update on the continuing development of the draft WHR RMP. She explained the fire hazard assessment and the process used to determine potential treatment areas (PTAs). PTAs are areas identified for initial treatment and for continued maintenance of vegetation to reduce fire risks and fuel hazards. Judy provided an example in Anthony Chabot Park to further explain how this information was developed and will be used. Site specific wildfire hazard reduction and resource management goals will be established for each PTA. Preliminary treatment recommendations will be included in the WHR RMP. Further information will be provided in the WHR RMP related to sensitive resources, resource protection and best management practices. An implementation and monitoring process will be identified to complete this loop allowing for adaptive management of the PTAs as the treatments and follow-up maintenance are implemented.

Richard Nichols, LSA, provided a further explanation of how the sensitive resources are factored into the preliminary PTA treatment recommendations taking into account, species of special concern, geologic conditions, cultural resources etc. Assistant Chief Swanson and Stewardship Manager Joe DiDonato discussed how the District staff will implement the plan. Fire and Stewardship staff are already working together on existing, FEMA-funded fuels management areas to ensure proper resource protection and restoration for fuels management areas. Each year the District Fire Department, and Stewardship staff will use the plan to establish work priorities in a Fire Action Plan. They will inventory existing conditions in proposed work areas, write project prescriptions to define work methods and resource protections, and define a post-treatment monitoring protocol to inform future decision making.

Questions and comments regarding the WHR RMP Overview included: *EBRPD and Team responses are in italics.*

- Is the Plan and EIR intended to cover all District park lands? *Judy Malamut responded that no, the WHR RMP is meant to cover only the parks within the Study Area.*
- A commenter noticed that the use of chemicals to control exotic and invasive plants was included in the tool box of methods and wanted to know if we knew about an injunction concerning the use of chemicals near red-legged frog aquatic habitat. *Joe DiDonato responded that the District was very aware of the injunction and followed it wherever it was applicable in regards to having appropriate setbacks from aquatic features when using chemicals.*
- A commenter wondered if the WHR RMP was recommending clear cutting of all eucalyptus in the identified PTAs? *LSA and District staff responded that a variety of prescriptions (e.g., removal of ground fuels (litter), thinning, logging, etc.) would be identified to address the significant fire hazards associated with eucalyptus depending on the location and environmental conditions of the PTA being treated.*

EIR Scoping Session. Judy Malamut provided an overview of the CEQA process and a framework for the EIR Scoping Session. The Team will prepare a programmatic EIR for the WHR RMP.

EIR Scoping comments included:

- Public input should be incorporated into each year's Fire Action Plan as it comes to the District Board for approvals.
- Look at scientific research regarding removal/clear cutting versus thinning and maintenance of trees.
- Ranking of risk needs to be detailed enough to distinguish between whole tree versus litter. Concerned that eucalyptus was designated as high-risk species when the issue is the litter rather than the tree. (2 commenters)
- Air quality needs to specifically address the effect cutting down trees has on global warming and the impact of treatments on greenhouse gases.
- Clarify why grass is preferred to eucalyptus given the flame lengths and rate of spread. Was any study done on fire movement through grass compared to trees (2 commenters)
- What happened to the fundamental notion of "native?" The role of local native plant and animal species in the decision making process should be specifically addressed.
- Plan should be about fire risk management and not native plant restoration.
- Identify the vulnerabilities in the current monitoring feedback loop and comment on how the Plan includes solutions to address the current shortfalls.
- How does the Plan relate to goals and programs of the City of Oakland and other neighboring jurisdictions? Since EBRPD has many parks in Oakland and other jurisdictions they need to work collaboratively to align goals, prescriptions and programs.
- Address wind driven fires contrasted with fuel driven fires and the different methods of mitigation for each.
- Include a definition of native plants and their relative fuel characteristics.
- Best Management Practices need to address the *Phytophthora* pathogen (fungus) associated with the Alameda manzanita which can be spread with pruning.
- Include locally rare plants (see Dianne Lake's list for Alameda County).
- Mitigation and monitoring plan needs to be completed with the Draft EIR and include contingencies.
- State alternative solutions for treatment and evaluate them for the specific PTAs in the Draft EIR.
- Concerned about the balance between fire hazard reduction and protection of habitat/ resources.
- Concerned about aesthetics of Anthony Chabot Park between Skyline and Redwood Road. Would like to see eucalyptus thinned and sprouts eliminated.
- Will the Program EIR have follow up supplements with the details worked out for each parcel?
- EIR should incorporate what has been learned from the demonstration projects of the last 10 years (e.g. grassland projects).
- Page 2 of the Initial Study identifies the WHR RMP as a "system-wide programmatic plan pertaining to a broader set of parks." Clarify what this is saying – is it district wide or for the 19,000 acres identified in the plan?
- How do you define 'native;' focus on "invasive" instead.
- Good job planning. Balancing life-safety for both public and firefighters with resource protection/ enhancement is a critical issue to be addressed.
- Concerned about the spread of Sudden Oak Death and the potential oak woodland monoculture being recommended.

Written comments were also submitted at the meeting including the following topics:

- Definition of mitigation techniques being proposed and discussion of alternatives. Wants opportunity to comment on specific techniques employed.
- Effective mitigation must address issues beyond reduction or management of fuel load. Address training and equipping fire crews for conflagrations, streamlined response and mutual aid, under grounding of wires, closing of roads, access and evacuation, zoning and building codes.
- Commenter takes exception to identifying eucalyptus trees as high hazard, as opposed to the litter underneath them as the material that should be targeted.
- Who determined that eucalyptus was creating high fire hazards? What fires in California were started in or by Eucalyptus?