

Draft of 12/5/24

**PROPOSAL FOR REGIONAL VEGETATION MANAGEMENT
IN THE EAST BAY HILLS
PREPARED BY
THE EAST BAY WILDFIRE COALITION OF GOVERNMENTS**

INTRODUCTION

The California wildfire crisis continues to worsen, and the effects of climate change and decades of fire suppression are evident in the vegetation of the East Bay Hills. These stressors have increased the vulnerability of the East Bay to wildfire through heavy loads of highly flammable fuel. Endemic species are at risk as nonnative vegetation dominates habitat for hardwoods and grasslands, reducing biodiversity. Together, these factors have increased the potential for catastrophic wildfires like the Tunnel Fire (also known as the Oakland Hills firestorm), one of California's most destructive wildfires, which tore through the wildland urban interface (WUI) of Oakland and Berkeley in 1991. In recent years, California has seen many of the deadliest and most destructive wildfires in recorded history.

Due to the immediacy of the wildfire threat to the lives, property, and natural resources of the East Bay and the urgency expressed by the community, the East Bay Wildfire Coalition of Governments (EBWC) has formed to develop a collaborative and regional approach to reduce wildfire risk on the western slope of the East Bay Hills of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, including to over 90,000 homes. The EBWC is a consortium of elected officials representing cities, the two counties, and fire districts committed to safeguarding the communities and natural landscapes in the East Bay Hills. To reduce wildfire risk in the East Bay Hills, the EBWC needs science-based and data-driven approaches to ecosystem and community resiliency as well as proactive community engagement, education, and collaboration.

The current membership of the EBWC includes Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, the cities of Berkeley, El Cerrito, Hercules, Oakland, Pinole and Richmond and the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District.

To address degraded ecosystems and hazardous fuel conditions resulting from drought, invasive species, and decades of fire suppression, the EBWC is proposing a four-point program to provide the necessary tools to prepare the EBWC agencies for implementation of ecologically appropriate and risk reducing vegetation treatments in their jurisdictions. The four points are : 1) Reconnaissance-level historical ecology research, synthesizing a range of archival data sources to provide preliminary information about pre-colonization vegetation conditions to guide restoration planning. 2) A Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan with parcel-specific vegetation treatment recommendations, building on existing vegetation and fire risk mapping. 3) Environmental documentation in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for implementation of our proposed Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan. 4) Support for local agencies implementing vegetation management programs to ensure that the limited additional reporting and careful monitoring is conducted in compliance with environmental laws and regulations. In addition, the EBWC and its lead agency will oversee and coordinate the various consultants required to develop the work products in this

proposal and review each product to help maintain consistency across products, thereby maximizing their usefulness.

The study area for this proposed work is assumed to be approximately 50,000 acres containing areas designated as high or very high fire hazard severity zones to the west of the East Bay Regional Park District land in the East Bay Hills of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties and is primarily located within the EBWC's Urban coalition member area.

PROPOSED SCOPE OF WORK

Product 1: Historical Ecology Reconnaissance Study

The selected consultant for this product will conduct a reconnaissance study of the historical ecology of high fire-risk areas of the East Bay Hills prior to major European-American modification. Synthesizing a range of archival data sources, this research will provide foundational information about historical landscape patterns and processes to contextualize current management challenges and help inform landscape-scale restoration plans and vegetation treatment targets for wildfire risk reduction. Findings from the historical ecology research will also serve as a resource for development of educational and community engagement materials. This work will draw on existing historical ecological research in landscapes across the state, including studies in the nearby Alameda Creek and Wildcat Creek watersheds.

The consultant will gather a subset of high-priority archival data, including early maps and surveys, photographs, and textual accounts, from a range of online databases and source institutions. Collected sources may span late 18th through early 20th centuries and include information about historical habitat extent, distribution, structure, composition, and other topics. High priority maps and other spatial data sources will be compiled in a GIS database, and non-spatial data will be compiled and organized thematically or geographically. Data will be synthesized to provide a high-level overview of historical ecological conditions (and where possible land use history) in the study area, focusing on 19th century conditions prior to major Euro-American modification; this reconnaissance study will not include extensive digital mapping of historical landscape patterns. Methods and results from the historical ecology research will be summarized in a brief technical report and slide presentation.

The proposed budget for the historical ecology work product (\$100,000) reflects the level of research depth, coordination/communication, and reporting detail that we believe is sufficient to provide the needed data and analysis for the following tasks.

Task 1 Data Collection

The consultant will collect historical texts, photographs and maps relevant to the study area. Selected high-priority historical data will be acquired primarily from in-house collections and online databases. The assembled data may include historical aerial imagery, key early maps and land surveys, narrative descriptions (e.g., early explorer accounts, newspaper articles), and other selected high-priority sources.

Task 2 Data Compilation

The consultant will compile key sources to facilitate synthesis of data collected in Task 1, including sources previously collected pertaining to the East Bay Hills' historical landscape. Compilation activities may include georeferencing of high-priority maps, transcription of relevant excerpts from historical texts, and geolocation of selected historical photos and/or narrative descriptions.

Task 3 Synthesis and Analysis

The consultant will organize compiled materials thematically and/or geographically and synthesize them into a set of preliminary findings about historical landscape conditions in high fire-risk areas of the East Bay Hills, focusing on documenting pre-modification vegetation conditions (i.e., distribution, composition, and structure), and potentially other topics based on project partner input as the budget permits. In addition, the consultant will conduct limited outreach and engagement with local Tribal partners and also will work with project partners to identify priority interests.

Task 4 Reporting and Communication

The consultant will create a brief (~3-4 page) technical report (without designed elements) detailing these emerging findings, highlighting key sources, and summarizing the data collection and compilation process. Additionally, the consultant will develop a slidedeck and deliver one remote presentation to project partners, other collaborators, and interested parties. The consultant will work with project partners to present project deliverables in ways that are most useful to the overall restoration and vegetation treatment planning efforts.

Task 5 Coordination and Advising

The consultant will coordinate with a small number (1-2) of informal technical advisors to guide research activities, provide input on data interpretation, and review deliverables. The consultant will meet with the full East Bay Wildfire Coalition project team to coordinate project activities.

Task 6 Project Management

Project management tasks will include invoicing (no more than monthly), progress reports, and coordination with the EBWC lead agency project manager.

Deliverables

- ▲ Brief technical report (~3-4 pages in low end budget scenario; ~7-10 pages in high end budget scenario) without designed elements, summarizing data collection and compilation methodology, relevant examples of source material, and emerging findings
- ▲ Remote presentation and accompanying slide deck delivered to the East Bay Wildfire Coalition

Product 2: WUI Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan

The consultant selected for Product 2 will develop a Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan for the western slope of the East Bay Hills that targets areas for forest restoration and fuels reduction. The plan will result in maps that show areas recommended for treatment. The areas recommended will be accompanied by the recommended treatments (e.g., thinning from below followed by air curtain burning, shaded and open space fuel breaks, eucalyptus removal, etc.) as well as estimated treatment costs. The Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan will be developed by the consultant who shall assemble an interdisciplinary team of natural resources specialists, working with the East Bay Coalition of Governments and local East Bay forest and wildland fuels practitioners.

The development of the Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan will occur in following tasks:

Task 1 Compile Data and Create Webmaps

The consultant will compile existing foundational geospatial datasets to support restoration planning. These datasets will include best-available GIS layers that depict vegetation type, forest structure, topography, land ownership, administrative boundaries, etc. These datasets will be made available to the project team and partners via an ArcGIS Online web mapping application.

Task 2 Create Planning Units

Using a combination of topography, major roads, ownership, and administrative boundaries, the consultant will divide the overall project area into several planning units. Planning units divide the larger East Bay Hills project area into manageable sub-areas for the purposes of project planning (and eventually implementation and monitoring).

Task 3 Create Project Polygons

The consultant will analyze geospatial datasets including hazard, risk to structures, ladder, fuels, and fine scale vegetation community type and begin to develop treatment area polygons for forest restoration. Some limited site visits will complement the geospatial analysis. Based on the analysis and the limited site visits, The consultant will develop draft polygons for restoration. The draft polygons will be shared with a limited set of stakeholders and then iterated/refined based on input and review.

The final proposed polygons slated for treatment will be assigned attribution for the activities to occur in them (e.g., thinning from below followed by air curtain burning, shaded fuel break, eucalyptus removal, etc.) as well as the estimated costs of the treatments.

The draft project polygons (and the final ones when complete) will be published as an ArcGIS Online service so they can be shared with others in webmaps and webapps.

Task 4 Report

The consultant will draft a brief (~10-page) report that outlines the types of activities that will be implemented (e.g., thinning from below, eucalyptus removal, etc.) on the project polygons, and

provides guidance on implementation and ranges for cost of implementation these activities. The report will include tables with treatment activities by acreage.

Deliverables

- ▲ ArcGIS Online Web Mapping Applications that contain geospatial datasets to support WUI vegetation and forest restoration planning
- ▲ Planning Unit boundaries
- ▲ Proposed project boundaries and recommended treatments for each polygon
- ▲ Brief narrative report, with reporting on proposed treatments by acreage

Assumptions

- ▲ This scope does not include implementation, coordination with landowners, or landowner outreach or research
- ▲ This scope of work does not include the services of a registered professional forester (RPF).

Product 3: CEQA Documentation

The California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP), developed by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection in 2019, is a critical component of the state's multi-faceted strategy to address California's wildfire crisis. The CalVTP includes the use of prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, manual treatments, targeted herbicide application, and prescribed herbivory as tools. These tools are vital to reducing hazardous vegetation around communities in the Wildland Urban Interface, to constructing fuel breaks (shaded or non-shaded), and to promoting ecological restoration of degraded vegetation communities. Numerous environmentally protective standard project requirements are incorporated into the program. The CalVTP Program Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) provides a powerful CEQA compliance tool to expedite the implementation of wildfire resilience projects. Any local or state agency providing funding or having land ownership, management, or other regulatory responsibility in the CalVTP program area (i.e., treatable landscape) can use the CalVTP to comply with CEQA for vegetation treatments consistent with the CalVTP Program EIR.

The EBWC will give serious consideration to using the CalVTP for CEQA coverage for its WUI Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan as described in Product 2. Using the CalVTP would involve preparation of a Project-Specific Analysis and Addendum to the CalVTP Program EIR (PSA/Addendum). Defensible space treatments could be covered by the CalVTP using the Addendum as long as they do not result in new or more substantially severe significant impacts under CEQA. Preparation of a PSA/Addendum for the Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan would provide the EBWC substantial cost and time savings compared to preparing a separate CEQA document (e.g., an Environmental Impact Report [EIR]). Extensive public review and agency and Tribal coordination occurred in 2019 for the CalVTP

Program EIR and does not need to be repeated for projects using the CalVTP. However, for projects preparing a PSA/Addendum under the CalVTP, additional limited reporting and Tribal and agency coordination are required. Once the Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan is complete (Product 2), preparation of a PSA/Addendum is anticipated to require 6 to 8 months to complete, depending on the level of coordination and review for each of the EBWC member agencies. One agency will need to assume the role of lead agency under CEQA, and the other member agencies will participate as responsible agencies under CEQA.

The consultant for Task 4 therefore must be familiar with the CalVTP Program EIR and associated CEQA efficiency process and able to assist the EBWC with efficient and effective CEQA permitting support for this project. The consultant must prepare a document enabling local EBWC agencies with ready-to-implement projects using CalVTP PSAs under expedited schedules. This includes compliance with requirements of regulatory agencies like the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

Task 1 PSA/Addendum Preparation

The consultant will compile the project description of the PSA/Addendum based on the work product under Task 2. The project description will incorporate the historical ecological context of the East Bay Hills based on the work product conducted in Task 1.

Once the project description is finalized, preparation of the PSA/Addendum will require a biological resources reconnaissance-level survey, cultural records searches, outreach letters to geographically affiliated Tribes, and coordination with CDFW and US Fish and Wildlife pursuant to requirements under the CalVTP.

Task 2 Agency Coordination

The consultant will coordinate with the EBWC member agencies during review of the (1) draft CEQA project description and (2) draft CEQA documentation (i.e., PSA/Addendum and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program [MMRP]). At the beginning of each review period, the consultant will present a briefing of the document to the member agencies to help facilitate their review and increase understanding of their use of the CalVTP. Input and comments will be incorporated into the final work products. The CEQA lead agency will help resolve any conflicting comments.

Deliverables

- ▲ Draft and Final Project Description
- ▲ Draft and Final PSA/Addendum
- ▲ Draft and Final Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- ▲ Draft and Final project-specific CEQA Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations

Assumptions

- ▲ The appropriate CEQA document will be a PSA/Addendum under the CalVTP Program EIR and will not require a separate document (e.g., EIR or MND)

Product 4: Support and Coordination of Local Agencies

The East Bay Wildfire Coalition of Government's goal with this proposal is to enable its local member agencies to move forward and, with local funding, implement vegetation management programs to reduce the risk of wildfire. Among the hurdles local governments have faced are 1) the lack of coordination with neighboring jurisdictions, 2) the preliminary work of developing plans and then 3) ensuring that they continue to meet CEQA requirements during the vegetation management work as they move forward. This proposal is designed to address these three issues.

Wildfire goes where the wind and the fuel load take it. Municipal and county lines mean nothing during a wildfire. Thus, vegetation management work that one jurisdiction may have undertaken likely will not prevent damage if vegetation on neighboring land in the upwind direction is not also well managed. Therefore, we are working on a region-wide level.

Local governments have learned that overcoming problems preparing plans and CEQA compliant documents is the first but not the last hurdle to implementing vegetation management programs. Site inspections and reporting both in advance of work beyond that included in Products 1 through 3 above will be required. And, as the vegetation management work progresses, monitoring by experts also will be required to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. For example, services of a forester will be needed in advance of vegetation work. Water resources must be protected, avian nesting season must be concluded, etc. This has proven to be an unanticipated hardship for local agencies.

This proposal is designed to enable all jurisdictions in the East Bay Hills WUI to coordinate their efforts and thereby reduce the risks to themselves and to each other. Product 4 is designed to enable all jurisdictions who undertake local programs to move forward with assurance that they are meeting all applicable laws and regulations. While it is impossible to know at the outset, before the regional plan is developed, which local jurisdictions will want to implement plans and raise the necessary funds for the local work, the EBWC wants to assure them that at least the initial agencies will have funds available for ongoing CEQA compliance. Funds for these costs are included in Product 4.

This proposal further recognizes that the lead agency must bear a major responsibility for managing this entire process that involves work benefitting the entire region beyond its own boundaries. The region covered by this proposal extends from Pinole and Hercules southward to Castro Valley. Therefore, the proposal also includes funding for lead agency oversight expenses.

PRICE PROPOSAL ESTIMATE EAST BAY WILDFIRE COALITION OF GOVERNMENTS

The proposed price to complete the enclosed scope of work is estimated to be \$650,000 and is summarized below. This price range estimate is being provided to help the EBWC obtain funds to carry out this project. This estimate is based on a good faith effort and current understanding of the funding needed and will be refined to reflect any updates to the scope of work at the time of contracting. Variations in approach, issues, and deliverables can adjust the contract price.

Work Products	TOTAL
Historical Ecological Study	\$100,000
Wildland Urban Interface Vegetation and Forest Restoration Plan	\$ 75,000
CEQA Documentation – CalVTP PSA/Addendum including agency coordination	\$250,000
Post CEQA compliance and lead agency expenses	\$225,000
TOTAL	\$ 650,000