



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-09-97
Meeting 09-28
October 28, 2009

AGENDA ITEM 13

AGENDA ITEM

Approval of Ongoing Treatment of Oaks for Suppression of Sudden Oak Death and Associated Research and Approval of the Categorical Exemption in Accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Determine that the recommended actions are categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as set out in this report.
2. Authorize the General Manager to negotiate a new agreement with Phytosphere Research for an amount not to exceed \$27,500 to extend research on the susceptibility of oaks through FY2010-11 from Sudden Oak Death (SOD) and to advise the District on appropriate treatment methods.

SUMMARY

Researchers recently determined that SOD is causing new symptoms and subsequent death of canyon live oaks (*Quercus chrysolepis*) at Los Trancos Open Space Preserve. Approving the recommended agreement in the amount of \$27,500 for FY2009-10 (\$9,100) and FY2010-11 (\$18,400) will allow the continuance of research into the susceptibility of canyon live oaks to SOD. Funding for this research will be reallocated from the deferred Mindego livestock fence project and will be cost neutral in the current fiscal year. The additional \$18,400 required to continue the work of Phytosphere Research in FY2010-11 will be requested in the next budget cycle. Grant funds will simultaneously be pursued to offset these future costs. Operations staff will also provide an update on the District-wide SOD program, including ongoing research with other oak species and progress in actual treatment provided under contract by a tree service company.

DISCUSSION

SOD is a plant disease that is causing large-scale die-off of oaks and tanoaks in many forests of coastal California. On December 14, 2005, the Board of Directors adopted a ten-year work plan for addressing SOD, including mapping of potentially resistant trees, treating a select number of

heritage trees with a fungicide, and establishing a collaborative fund for SOD research to help guide land management decisions (R-05-122).

In the summer of 2007, District staff noticed dead leaves and bleeding cankers on canyon live oaks in Los Trancos Open Space Preserve (OSP). Several canyon live oaks subsequently died and three trees adjacent to the San Andreas Fault Trail were removed or trimmed. Mortality of mature canyon live oaks from the SOD pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, has not been observed elsewhere in California.

SOD Diagnosis (Phytosphere Research)

In 2007, Dr. Ted Swiecki of Phytosphere Research was hired to diagnose pathogens causing disease symptoms on stands of coast live oak, Shreve oaks and tanoaks in Rancho San Antonio, Monte Bello and El Corte de Madera Open Space Preserves. At these three District preserves, Dr. Swiecki is continuing to provide advice and monitor the effectiveness of treatment methods. More recently, he began to investigate tree mortality in Los Trancos Open Space Preserve. By June 2009, Dr. Swiecki had concluded that *P. ramorum* is associated with the cankers that have elevated mortality rates of canyon live oaks at Los Trancos. The \$15,000 originally allocated to fund the initial diagnostic work of Phytosphere Research has been spent. Continuation of this important diagnostic work through the remainder of FY2009-10 and all of FY2010-11 will cost \$27,500 as noted above. This work would include developing and testing treatment methods especially in Los Trancos and other Skyline area preserves where unusually large and spectacular specimens of this tree occur. The treatments would consist of removal of California bay trees in the vicinity of large oaks and spraying approximately 30 selected trees with a fungicide annually.

FISCAL IMPACT

The proposed new contract with Phytosphere Research will be cost neutral with respect to the FY2009-10 budget. Current fiscal year funds will be reallocated from the Mindego livestock fence project to fund all FY2009-10 SOD research and treatment. In FY2010-11, staff will request an additional \$28,000 for SOD research (\$18,400, to fund the remainder of the subject Phytosphere Research contract) and treatment (\$9,600 to fund the application of Agri-Fos® by the tree service company.). Staff will continue to pursue grant funding for this regionally significant project.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Notices were also sent to persons requesting notice of resource management activities.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The District concludes that this action consists of information collection and minor alteration of vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas that will result in the protection and improvement of wildlife habitat. It will not result in serious or major disturbance to any environmental or historical resources; removal of healthy, mature scenic trees; impacts to environmental resources of hazardous or critical concern; significant effects or cumulative impacts. None of the actions will be visible from a scenic highway. None of the sites are located on a hazardous waste site. Therefore, it is categorically exempt under Sections 15304 (Minor Alterations of Land) and 15306 (Information Collection) of the CEQA Guidelines.

NEXT STEPS

A new agreement will be negotiated with Phytosphere Research. Staff will conduct surveys for heritage-sized oaks with scenic and ecological values in Los Trancos, Monte Bello and other Skyline area preserves. Phytosphere Research will recommend specific treatment methods intended to save these specimen trees. The California Conservation Corps will remove bay trees and a tree service company will spray fungicide on selected oaks beginning in November 2009.

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Same as Above