

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

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The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) is a public agency formed by voter initiative in 1972. Midpen's purpose is to acquire and permanently protect a regional greenbelt of open space lands, preserve and restore wildlife habitat, watersheds, viewsheds, and fragile ecosystems, and provide opportunities for low-intensity recreation and environmental education. In 2004 Midpen expanded to protect the San Mateo County Coast ~~coastside~~. Reflecting the interests of Coastside ~~coastside~~ residents, Midpen's mission on the San Mateo County Coastside ~~mission~~ includes preserving the rural character and agricultural heritage of the coastside and encouraging viable agricultural use of land resources. Midpen's mission outlines the critical functions of the agency, balancing the preservation of open space with active land restoration, low-intensity public recreation, and viable agricultural use. Midpen has preserved a regional greenbelt system of nearly 65,000 acres of public land and manages 26 open space preserves (OSPs) and other land under management agreements (referred to as "Midpen lands" throughout this document).

The Wildland Fire Resiliency Program (Program) addresses wildland fire management across all Midpen owned and managed lands.

1.1.2 History

Post-World War II was a time of rapid growth in the San Francisco Bay Area. As tract housing and commercial development began to dominate the "Valley of Heart's Delight," concern for the preservation of the mid-peninsula's irreplaceable foothill and bayland natural resources mounted among open space advocates. Midpen was created by successfully placing a voter initiative, Measure R, on the ballot in 1972.

Measure R will preserve open space by creating the Midpeninsula Regional Park District (currently named the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District). Open space is our green backdrop of hills. It is rolling grasslands – cool forests in the Coast Range – orchards and vineyards in the sun. It is the patch of grass between communities where children can run. It is uncluttered baylands where water birds wheel and soar, where blowing cordgrass yields its blessings of oxygen, where the din of urban life gives way to the soft sounds of nature. It is the serene, unbuild, unspoiled earth that awakens all our senses and makes us whole again ... it is room to breathe.

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Midpen was first created in northwestern Santa Clara County. Fulfilling the conservationists' original dream to include portions of San Mateo County within the Midpen jurisdiction, voters expanded the boundaries in 1976 to include southern San Mateo County. Midpen further expanded in 1992, by annexing a small portion of Santa Cruz County. With the final approval of the Coastsides Protection Program on September 7, 2004, Midpen's boundary was extended to the Pacific Ocean in San Mateo County, from the southern borders of Pacifica to the Santa Cruz county line.

1.1.3 Mission Statement and Organization

Midpen's mission is:

"To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education."

Midpen's Coastsides mission is:

"To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land and agricultural land of regional significance, protect and restore the natural environment, preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education."

Midpen is divided into seven geographic wards, each represented by a publicly elected Board member for a four-year term.

1.2 Wildland Fire Resiliency Program Overview

1.2.1 Purpose, Need, and Objectives

Wildland fire prevention, preparation, and response are a part of Midpen's land stewardship. California's fire season is now longer and more intense due in part to dense regrowth of historically logged forests, more than a century of fire suppression, increased development in the WUI, and a changing climate. To meet these growing challenges, Midpen is establishing this Program to allow for increased and environmentally sensitive vegetation management. Vegetation management activities can reduce the potential for severe wildland fire. A major wildland fire on unmanaged lands likely will have more substantial ecosystem, recreation, carbon, and resource impacts than the impacts from the work to manage the vegetation.

The objectives of the Program are as follows:

1. Manage vegetation (including invasive fire-prone trees) to establish healthy, resilient, fire-dependent or fire-adapted ecosystems, furthering Midpen's mission to protect and restore the diversity and integrity of the ecological processes on Midpen lands and facilitate healthy post-fire recovery.

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2. Integrate Native American traditional ecological knowledge ~~cultural~~ practices of ~~vegetation~~ natural resource management, particularly as they relate to prescribed fire, that promote ecological resiliency and enhance biodiversity.
3. Manage vegetation and infrastructure on Midpen lands to reduce wildland fire risks, improve wildland fire fighting capabilities and coordination, and improve overall safety to reduce the harmful effects of wildland fire on people, property, and natural resources.
4. Provide an adaptive framework for periodic review of and revisions to Midpen decisions in response to a changing climate, improved knowledge, and improved technology. This framework also considers competing Midpen priorities, capacity, funding and fiscal sustainability, and partnerships to determine the location, scale, and timing, ~~and scope~~ of future vegetation management activities.

1.2.2 Framework of the Program

This Program documents and permits the various planning efforts needed to meet Midpen's objectives for establishing wildland fire resiliency on its lands. It is meant to guide a comprehensive approach to vegetation management, including pre- and post-response activities to wildland fire on Midpen lands.

This document is organized as follows:

- **Introduction:** Provides an overview of Midpen lands, management, and purpose of the Program;
- **Background and Environmental Setting:** Describes the open space preserves and managed land system, resources, landscape, and other current site conditions;
- **Wildland Fire Resiliency Program Policies:** Identifies Midpen's Resource Management Policies that require updating to support the Program;
- **Vegetation Management Plan (VMP):** Addresses creation and maintenance of fuelbreaks, fuel management zones, and defensible space zones using vegetation management techniques addressed in Midpen's Integrated Pest Management Program (IPMP);
- **Prescribed Fire Plan (PFP):** Addresses the methods and implementation of prescribed fire to manage fuel and improve ecosystem health;
- **Wildland Fire Pre-Plan/Resource Advisor Maps:** Describes the creation of Resource Advisor maps for each OSP and other managed land (or groups of managed lands) that will include information on existing conditions, infrastructure, and resources constraints that can aid fire suppression activities and locate sensitive resource areas that merit protection from potential damage due to fire or fire suppression activities;
- **Monitoring Plan:** Provides a framework for recording pre-project conditions, vegetation treatment response, and fuels inventories to inform future adaptive management techniques; and

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- **Maximum Acreage of Annual Treatment:** Describes the maximum treatment areas by activity per year.

1.2.3 Planning and Development Process

Collaboration and Approval of the Program

The Program requires approval by the Midpen Board of Directors (Board). The Program development process has included numerous public meetings, in-person meetings, phone calls and email feedback from partners and stakeholders, including cooperating and collaborative agencies, local fire agencies, tribes, and the public (including non-governmental organizations), including:

- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) (Santa Clara and San Mateo-Santa Cruz Units)
- The Amah Mutsun Tribal Band
- San Mateo County Fire Department
- Santa Clara County Fire Department
- Woodside Fire Protection District
- Los Altos Hills County Fire District
- San Mateo County Fire Safe Council
- Santa Clara County Fire Safe Council
- The Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter
- National Audubon Society, Sequoia
- The University of California, Berkeley Forests
- Communities of Grandview/Espinosa, Heather Heights, Redwood Estates, Blackberry Hill, and Skyline/Kings Mountain

The Program has also been reviewed by the Board's Planning and Natural Resources Committee. Moreover, during the week of August 19th, public meetings were held in the communities of Half Moon Bay, Los Gatos, and Woodside. The objective of these meetings was to communicate Midpen's Program components and invite early public comments on its development.

Communication with local fire departments is also a critical component of the plan. The following fire departments have been contacted or will be contacted during more detailed development of the PFP:

- Coastside Fire Protection District
- La Honda Fire Brigade
- Santa Clara County Fire Department
- Palo Alto Fire Department
- Mountain View Fire Department
- San Jose Fire Department
- National Park Service
- San Carlos/Redwood City Fire Department

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- Kings Mountain Fire Brigade

California Environmental Quality Act Process (CEQA)

The approval and implementation of this Program requires review under CEQA, with Midpen serving as the lead agency. A Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) has been determined to be the appropriate document under CEQA. The Program EIR addresses the potential impacts from the Vegetation Management Plan in detail. Projects or activities under that plan would be able commence as soon as the Program EIR is completed and certified. The Program EIR also addresses the potential environmental impacts of the PFP and any new infrastructure that may be built under the Wildland Fire Pre-Plan, at a programmatic level. Additional CEQA review, likely tiered from the Program EIR may be required to implement these plans and activities if these are not sufficiently addressed in the 2020 Program EIR.

Permitting

Activities or projects carried out under the Program may require permits from resource agencies or local jurisdictions before the work can commence. Table 1-1 summarizes some of the permits that may be required.

Table 1-1 Potential Permits or Approvals Needed for the Program

Agency	Approval or Notification	Component of Program
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Clean Water Act, Section 404, Nationwide Permit 14	Potential impacts to jurisdictional waters of the U.S., such as for stream crossings for equipment or infrastructure.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion and Take Authorization	If any activities could result in take of a threatened, endangered, or candidate species.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Responsible and Trustee agency for CEQA review	During CEQA compliance process.
	1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement	For potential impacts to riparian areas or any stream crossings.
	2081 Incidental Take Permit or Consistency Determination	If any activities could result in the death of a state listed species.
California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)	Encroachment permits	For encroachment on Caltrans right-of-way
	<u>Transportation permits</u>	<u>For oversize or overweight vehicles traveling on Caltrans right-of-way.</u>
<u>California Coastal Commission (sought through applicable county planning and building department)</u>	<u>Coastal Development Permit or an exemption</u>	<u>For vegetation management or other development in the Coastal Zone</u>
<u>California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection</u>	<u>Burn Permit</u>	<u>For any prescribed burn activities</u>

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Agency	Approval or Notification	Component of Program
Bay Area Air Quality Management District	<u>Prescribed Burning Smoke Management Plan (Form Rx-1)</u> <u>Prescribed Burn Permit</u>	For any prescribed burn activities
	<u>Open Burning Regulation 5 Notification Form</u>	<u>For any pile burn activities</u>
<u>Monterey Bay Air Resources District</u>	<u>Smoke Management Plan and Smoke Management Permit</u>	<u>For any prescribed burn activities over 10 acres.</u>
	<u>Prescribed Burn Permit</u>	<u>For any prescribed or pile burn activities.</u>
San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board or Monterey Regional Water Quality Control Board	Section 401 Water Quality Certification	If a Section 404 permit is needed
	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit	For ground disturbing impacts over 1 acre in size
	Waste Discharge Requirement	For potential impacts to waters of the state that are not waters of the U.S.
Local Public Works Departments, Building Departments (San Mateo County, Santa Clara County, Santa Cruz County, <u>and local cities</u>)	Various types of encroachment, building, <u>planning</u> , or grading permits	For encroachment into roadways to perform work, for any new fire protection infrastructure that may be needed.
	Local tree protection and brush removal <u>permits based on local ordinances of</u> various counties and cities	For potential impacts on trees and brush
	<u>Transportation/ oversize or overweight permits</u>	<u>For oversize or overweight vehicles traveling on local rights-of-way.</u>