

Notice of Availability

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Wildland Fire Resiliency Program

San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz Counties, California

Date: January 15, 2021

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Subject: Notice of Availability of a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report for the Proposed Wildland Fire Resiliency Program (SCH# 2020049059)

Review Period: January 15, 2021 to March 1, 2021 (5:00 p.m.)

Introduction

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) is the Lead Agency, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), for the Wildland Fire Resiliency Program (WFRP or Program) Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Adoption and implementation of the WFRP by Midpen is considered a discretionary action and is, therefore, subject to CEQA. Midpen has prepared the Draft Program EIR for the WFRP to satisfy the requirements of the CEQA (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.). The Draft Program EIR (SCH# 2020049059) is now available for review. Midpen will hold a public review meeting on February 25, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. In accordance with public health shelter-at-home orders, **all Midpen board meetings will be held via Teleconference ONLY**. The meetings may be viewed online at <https://www.openspace.org/about-us/board-meetings>.

Program Location

The actions under the Program could be applied on all Midpen's open space preserves (OSPs) and other areas under Midpen management (collectively referred to as "Midpen lands"). Midpen is located along the western edge of the North American continent on a geologically active peninsula between the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay, which limits migration of plants and animals. This unique location is contained within the Santa Cruz Mountain region. The region's Mediterranean climate is comprised of mild wet winters and long, hot, and dry summers cooled by cyclical coastal fog. Midpen's boundary extends along the San Francisco Bay from San Carlos to Los Gatos and along the Pacific coast from south of Pacifica to the Santa Cruz County line. Midpen lands permanently protect wildlife habitat, natural resources, watersheds, and a variety of ecosystems.

Description of Proposed Program

Purpose and Objectives

Changing climatic conditions, past land uses, and years of fire suppression have increased fuel loads and fire-prone conditions that could contribute to larger and more intense wildland fires. Midpen seeks to protect the natural resources on its land and to make policy decisions that support local and state fire agencies to aid in the suppression of wildfire. The Program encompasses vegetation management, as well as planning, response, and monitoring. Vegetation management helps to restore ecosystems closer to pre-fire suppression conditions through the removal of dead and accumulated vegetation and treatment of forest disease and invasive species. Prior to the mid- to late-20th century, landscapes in the San Francisco Bay Area were subject to periodic natural fire and Native American practices of prescribed burning that kept fuel loads down. Before European contact, the spread of invasive species that alter ecosystems and increase fire risks was a lower concern. Today, in the absence of decades of natural and prescribed fires, live and dead fuels have accumulated creating higher surface fuel loads, vegetation density, and varied species composition from what was seen prior to European contact. The Program would guide Midpen activities and be periodically updated, as needed, to adapt to changing conditions and improved knowledge. The primary objectives of the Program include the following:

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.
2. Integrate Native American traditional ecological knowledge practices of 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 of future vegetation management activities.

Program Considerations

The WFRP is a programmatic document that is intended to help guide Midpen's vegetation and fuel management activities. As such, the Program provides a framework to guide decisions on the types, locations, and timing of vegetation and fuel management activities. The scope, scale, and level of focus that Midpen would be able to apply to vegetation and fuel management activities would vary each year and would be dependent on other competing Midpen project and Program priorities, staffing capacity, and funding availability. Given the ongoing growth of Midpen land holdings, changing climate conditions that may affect fire risk levels across the landscape, and other factors, Midpen may shift their vegetation and fuel management priorities as needed in response to new or changed priority sites.

Annual vegetation and fuel management projects and Program budgets would be reviewed in the context of the larger agency-wide work plan with discretionary approval held by the Midpen Board of Directors as part of the annual budget and action plan development process.

Program Overview

The Program is a comprehensive document that includes the following components:

- **Introduction:** Provides an overview of Midpen lands, management, and purpose of the Program;
- **Background and Environmental Setting:** Describes the OSPs and managed land system, resources, landscape, and other current environmental conditions;
- **Wildland Fire Resiliency Program Policies:** Identifies Midpen’s Resource Management Policies (RM Policies) that would be updated 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 at the programmatic level;
- **Wildland Fire Pre-Plans/Resource Advisor Maps:** Describes the creation of Resource Advisor maps for each OSP and other managed land (or groups of managed lands) that would include information on existing conditions, infrastructure, and resources constraints to 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
- **Maximum Acreage of Annual Treatment:** Describes the maximum treatment acreages by activity per year.

The Program would guide a comprehensive approach to vegetation management, including pre- and post- response activities to wildland fire on Midpen lands that integrates the four plans summarized above. The VMP and the PFP are the primary plans within the Program that could result in physical effects on the environment. In addition, the Wildland Fire Pre-Plan includes potential new infrastructure to support wildland fire response that also could result in physical effects on the environment. The Program EIR focuses on the elements of the Program that may result in physical effects on the environment.

Significant Environmental Impacts of the Program

The Draft Program EIR identifies potentially significant impacts from implementation of the WFRP in the following CEQA environmental issue areas: aesthetics; air quality; biological resources; cultural and tribal cultural resources; geology and soils; greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; hazards, hazardous materials, and wildland fire; hydrology and water quality; noise; recreation; and transportation, and cumulative effects. As described in the Draft EIR, many of these impacts can be mitigated to less than significant levels but some cannot. The Program would result in significant unavoidable impacts on aesthetics from tree and vegetation removal, air quality and global GHG emissions from generation of criteria air pollutant and GHG emissions during implementation of program activities.

Documents Available for Public Review

Hard copies of the Draft Program EIR can be reviewed at the location listed below and an electronic version can be viewed online at <https://www.openspace.org/our-work/projects/wfrp>. To view the hard copies at Midpen's Administrative Office, members of the public must first call or email ahead to schedule a review time given COVID-19-related office closures and limited staff presence in the office. Midpen's COVID-19 safety protocols must be followed, including face masks and physical distancing of 6 feet, for entry into the Administrative Office and for duration of reviewing the document.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Administrative Office
330 Distel Circle
Los Altos, CA 94022-1404
(650) 691-1200
Typical office hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (except holidays)
Go here for directions to this office: http://www.openspace.org/contact_us.asp

The Draft Program EIR is also available at the following locations for review:

- *Seven Springs Station 2*: 21000 Seven Springs Parkway, Cupertino, CA 95014
- *Los Gatos Station 3*: 306 University Avenue, Los Gatos, CA 95030
- *Redwood Station 4*: 21452 Madrone Drive, Los Gatos, CA 95033
- *Monta Vista Station 7*: 22620 Stevens Creek Boulevard, Cupertino, CA 95014
- *Los Altos Station 15*: 10 Almond Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022
- *San Carlos Station 16*: 1286 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Carlos, CA 94070
- *Woodside Fire Protection District Administration Office*: 808 Portola Rd #C, Portola Valley, CA 94028
- *Woodside HQ Station 7*: 3111 Woodside Road, Woodside, CA 94062
- *Woodside Station 19*: 4091 Jefferson Avenue, Woodside, CA 94062
- *Woodside Station 8*: 135 Portola Road, Portola Valley, CA 94028
- *Skyllonda Station 58*: 17290 Skyline Boulevard, Woodside, CA 94062

Opportunity for Public Comment

Interested individuals, groups, and agencies may provide Midpen with written comments on the Draft Program EIR. Comments on the Draft Program EIR should be made in writing before the end of the comment period (March 1, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.). Written comments should be mailed or e-mailed to the address provided below. After the close of the public comment period, responses to the comments received on the Draft Program EIR will be prepared and published, and this Draft Program EIR will be updated with any revisions based on the response to comments, which will constitute the Final Program EIR.

Please mail, e-mail, or fax comments on the Draft Program EIR by the **March 1, 2021** at 5:00 p.m. deadline to:

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Attention: Coty Sifuentes-Winter, Senior Resource Management Specialist
Mailing Address: 330 Distel Circle, Los Altos, CA 94022
Email: csifuentes@openspace.org
Fax: (650) 691-0485

Comments provided by email should include “WFRP EIR Comment” in the subject line, and the name and physical address of the commenter in the body of the email.

All comments on environmental issues received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the Final Program EIR, which is anticipated for release in spring 2021.

Public Review Meeting on the Draft Program EIR

On March 17, 2020, the Governor issued Executive Order N-29-20 suspending certain provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act in order to allow for local legislative bodies to conduct their meetings telephonically or by other electronic means. A public scoping meeting will be held by Midpen to inform interested parties about the proposed project, and to provide agencies and the public with an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the Program EIR. The meeting will be held via teleconference on February 25, 2021 at 5 pm (as allowable by Executive Order N-25-20).

Individuals needing special assistive devices will be accommodated to Midpen’s best ability. For more information, please contact the District Clerk at (650) 691-1200 or clerk@openspace.org at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.