

Action 2:

East-Side Fuel Reduction Buffer Zone

Summary:

Recommend that EBRPD and EBMUD maintain in perpetuity a buffer of low flammability native vegetation on their property east of and adjacent to Grizzly Peak Blvd. and east of ridgeline homes to provide protection for the road and defensible space for fire suppression activities. This should be done in a way that maximizes native plant diversity and provides suitable wildlife habitat.

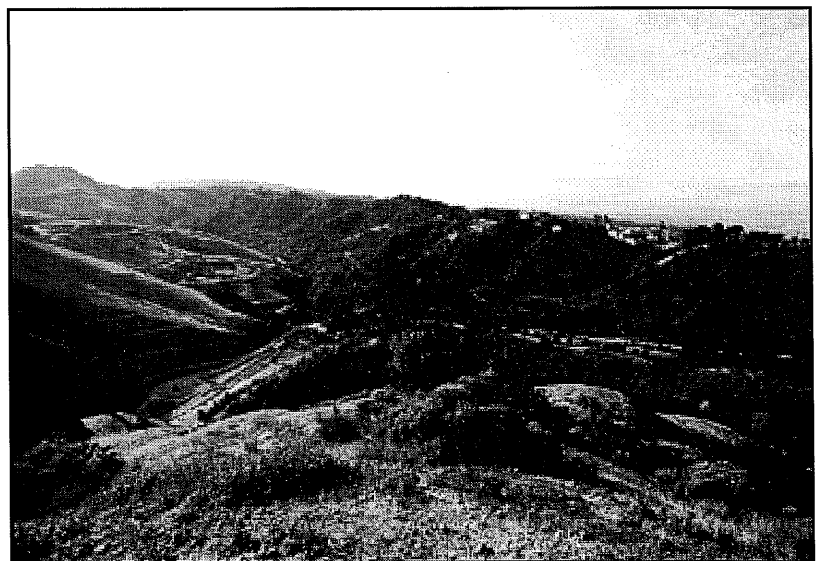
Description:

Manage EBRPD and EBMUD lands along Grizzly Peak Blvd. and below homes and other values at risk to create a zone of reduced fuels which, together with the management regime used on down-slope lands, is sufficient to reduce flame lengths to 8 feet, thereby protecting access routes and providing defensible space for fire fighting. The exact width of this more intensively treated zone is variable, but would range from approximately 100' below homes to approximately 75' along Grizzly Peak Blvd.

These fuel reduction buffers are not envisioned as denuded, barren wastelands nor even as monocultural belts of grassland. On the contrary, the buffers recommended for the east side of the Caldecott Corridor are a diverse and attractive mosaic of native vegetation which provides suitable habitat for many wildlife species. Primary vegetation types to be managed for include annual grassland, native perennial bunch grasses, mosaics of moist north coastal scrub (huckleberry, California blackberry, monkey flower, etc.), riparian scrub and forest in swales, and savannahs and stands of mature oak and bay trees. Stands of rare plants such as pallid manzanita (po-

tential to occur) and bitter cherry (known to occur) will be protected and promoted. Efforts should be made to sharply curtail the extent of non-native vegetation such as eucalyptus, French broom, and poison hemlock. Native vegetation will be encouraged in areas from which exotics have been removed.

The climax vegetation type in most of this area is generally oak/bay woodland, though on some sites patches of grassland, moist north coastal scrub, and riparian habitat represent the climax. Land managers will have to make site-by-site decisions on whether to manage to facilitate or resist successional processes, but most areas that are not already closed canopy woodland, or close to becoming closed canopy woodland, should generally be managed to become grasslands and shrub mosaics. Managing for such buffers may require the conversion of some brushy areas to patches of grassland or to mosaics of grasslands and low shrubs. Trees in this area will be protected from crown fire by the removal of ladder fuels. A long-term goal should be to facilitate restoration of perennial bunch grasslands wherever possible as such plant communities are rare and valuable because they present a lower fire risk for a larger portion of the year than the non-native annual grassland communities.



East-Side of the Caldecott Corridor from Mahonia Peak (J. Kopchik)

Implementation:

EBRPD and EBMUD are the agencies primarily responsible for these actions. Manual treatment and goat grazing are two management options that could be performed separately or in combination. Goat grazing can be less expensive and can mimic some historical ecological processes (elk), but manual treatment by trained crews can be more selective and better protect sensitive resources. Prescribed fire, other than pile burning of cut materials and other than for EBMUD property far from homes, is probably too complicated to be performed here with current techniques, but might become more feasible as the techniques evolve and improve. Recommended treatment prescriptions should be refined as we improve our understanding of fire behavior and treatment alternatives in this area. Fire modeling should be performed for this area to support adaptive management. Public involvement should continue. Please see the “Implementation Strategy” section for additional discussion of this issue.

Of the three recommended vegetation management actions related to the eastern slope of the ridge over the Caldecott Tunnel, this action should receive highest priority as the proposed work is nearest to homes.

Volunteer assistance may be helpful, particularly to assist with longer-term restoration objectives (i.e., restoration of perennial grasses).

Fiscal Impacts:

Manual treatment: \$500 to \$5000 per year per acre, depending on vegetation and work performed.

Goat grazing: \$600 to \$800 per year per acre.

CDF administers a Forest Stewardship Program which awards grants for forest management and pre-fire fuels treatment, with emphasis on projects that have established collaborative community partnerships. Funding options are discussed in more detail in the “Implementation Strategy” section at the end of this document.

Anticipated results:

Provide defensible space to fight a fire moving uphill from the east. Reduce the risk of fire to people and

property on and west of the ridge. Support productive, diverse native vegetation and help protect biological resources on the west-side from the short term significant impacts of a severe wildfire.

Cautions:

Fuel buffers cannot be neglected for long or they can become a hindrance rather than a help to firefighting. Care should be taken to prevent weed encroachment in the buffer and adjoining habitat. Vegetation management should not be a substitute for other actions to control the threat of fire, such as improved fire detection and response.