EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan (Plan) provides sound, long-term strategies for reducing fuel loads and managing vegetation within the East Bay Regional Park District's (EBRPD's) Study Area parks, to minimize the risk of Diablo wind-driven catastrophic wildfire along the wildland-urban interface while ensuring the protection and enhancement of ecological values and resources within EBRPD's jurisdiction. The Plan is consistent with the District's Master Plan and builds upon the District's ongoing fuels management activities, as well as the 1982 *Blue Ribbon Report,* the 1995 *Fire Hazard Mitigation Program & Fuel Management Plan for the East Bay Hills* (1995 Plan), and other District plans and policies.

Problem Statement:

The threat of catastrophic wildfires under Diablo wind conditions, high fuel loads in EBRPD parks, and continued community development in the wildland-urban interface present significant risks to public health and safety, homes, and property if not consistently and adequately addressed.

This Plan is one of a number of EBRPD projects funded through the passing of Measure CC by the voters in EBRPD Zone 1 (which includes nine cities in western Alameda and Contra Costa counties) in November 2004. EBRPD's fuel management activities have been ongoing for more than 72 years, funded largely from EBRPD's operating budget and from various fire hazard mitigation grants under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Voter approval of Measure CC gave EBRPD approximately $9 million in funding to create this Plan and to continue fuels management activities in the East Bay Hills according to the recommendations and guidelines contained herein. Once Measure CC was passed, EBRPD began working with a consulting team of planners and technical experts and under advisement from the Hills Emergency Forum (HEF) to engage in a planning process focused on achieving the desired outcomes of EBRPD's four key wildfire hazard reduction and resource management goals, further supported by objectives and guidelines as detailed in Chapter II of the Plan:

- Reduce fire hazards on District-owned lands in the East Bay's wildland-urban interface to an acceptable level
- Maintain and enhance ecological values for plant and wildlife habitat consistent with fire reduction goals
- Preserve aesthetic landscape values for park users and neighboring communities

- Provide a vegetation management plan which is cost-effective and both financially and environmentally sustainable to EBRPD on an on-going basis.

The threat of catastrophic wildfires under Diablo wind conditions presents significant risks to public health and safety, homes, and property along the wildland-urban interface. The hot and dry periods of late summer and fall in the Bay Area, the steep topography of the East Bay Hills, seasonal wind patterns, flammable vegetation, dense development patterns adjacent to parklands, and limited firefighting access all contribute to creating a substantial regional fire threat. A comprehensive and effective plan was necessary to direct future actions taken by EBRPD that will reduce wildfire risks and improve the ecological health of the Study Area. These actions include:

- Evaluating the location and adequacy of EBRPD's existing fuel reduction zone (a definition for the term "fuel reduction zone" as well as other terms used in this Plan can be found in Appendix A) as described in Chapter III,

- Delineating options for and engaging in appropriate fuel management and habitat restoration methods, as described in Chapters IV and V, and

- Prioritizing, evaluating, and implementing vegetation management policies and practices that achieve desired results while minimizing potential adverse environmental effects (see Chapters III and VI).

In order to achieve the District's goals the Plan sets forth a Vegetation Management Program (Chapter V) that identifies and describes the various vegetation types within the Study Area and their associated fuel characteristics, outlines fire hazard reduction and resource management goals, and identifies potential fuel treatment methods. Additionally, specific implementable recommendations and guidelines for reducing fuel loads and managing vegetation at recommended treatment areas within the Study Area are also provided in this Plan. Recommendations include types and frequency of fuel treatment actions, considerations for selecting treatments, suggested end-state vegetation types, and concerns regarding plant and animal species and other site-specific features that could potentially be affected by fuel treatment activities. The breadth of these recommendations, as well as park-specific maps displaying recommended treatment areas, are included in Chapter III. Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations.

As further described in Chapter VI. Plan Implementation, this Plan will be used by the District as part of an overarching management process under which site specific treatment areas and fuel reduction/resource management actions will be selected, evaluated and monitored, treatment activities will be completed and recorded in a GIS-based database, and all activities will be planned for, budgeted, and executed on a yearly basis.

Included in the Plan are the following key sections to provide program-level guidance and background information necessary for successful execution of the program:

- **Chapter I. Introduction.** This chapter identifies the problem statement for the Plan and provides a summary of wildfire history and need for the Plan. Also included in this chapter is a description of the Study Area and the planning process and public involvement that was undertaken to prepare the Plan.
- **Chapter II. Goals, Objectives, and Guidelines.** This chapter identifies the Plan's goals and objectives for reducing wildfire hazards and managing natural and cultural resources within the Study Area, and provides a summary of key guidelines to be used in achieving EBRPD's goals and objectives.
- **Chapter III. Wildfire Hazard Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations.** For defined and mapped treatment areas, this chapter provides resource information and recommendations for preliminary vegetation treatment goals and guidelines to be used by EBRPD staff when selecting and implementing future site specific fuel reduction treatment actions and best management practices (BMPs) for reducing wildfire hazards while protecting environmental resources in the Study Area. Also included is a discussion of strategic fire routes and facilities at risk, two factors external to fire science modeling that informed the hazard reduction recommendations in the treatment areas.
- **Chapter IV. Fuel Reduction Methods.** In this chapter, five treatment method categories are described – hand labor, mechanical treatment, chemical treatment, prescribed burning, and grazing – as well as techniques and timing considerations for implementing these treatment methods, where appropriate. This information is included to assist EBRPD in identifying, assessing and implementing, with reasonable consistency, those treatment methods that provide the greatest cost-benefit given site-specific factors. This chapter also includes BMPs, where applicable, that can be used to promote successful fuel reduction actions and ensure effective hazard reduction while promoting the highest environmental benefit for costs incurred.
- **Chapter V. Vegetation Management Program.** Included in this chapter is a vegetation management program (VMP) that:
    - Identifies and describes the various vegetation types found within the East Bay parklands and their associated fuel characteristics, and
    - Delineates recommended treatment performance standards for each vegetation type to meet EBRPD's vegetation management goals.

  Coupled with the information presented Chapter IV, Fuel Reduction Methods, the District can use the VMP to determine the specific wildfire hazard reduction and vegetation

management projects that will achieve the Plan goals and objectives over time. Treatment considerations for invasive plants are also described in this chapter.

- **Chapter VI. Plan Implementation.** This chapter describes the program- and project-level processes by which EBRPD will implement the necessary actions to reduce wildfire hazards and maintain and enhance environmental resources within the Study Area. This chapter also includes a process for feedback and incorporation of lessons learned from completed projects. This feedback and incorporation will occur in a manner similar to that found in adaptive environmental management systems and will enable EBRPD to create and implement increasingly successful and cost-effective vegetation management projects as new information is collected and experience gained about the long-term success of treatment techniques and objectives.

The reader should note that the primary purpose of this Plan is to assess the needs and recommend priorities for vegetation management in order to protect lives, property and natural resources from a catastrophic wildfire. At the same time, it provides necessary information and recommends Best Management Practices and guidelines intended to protect environmental values and enhance and preserve habitat for native plants and wildlife species. The specific goals, objectives, guidelines, and best management practices are provided to guide wildfire hazard reduction and resource management activities that will be carried out by EBRPD and its contractors over time and in a manner that blends ecological and resource considerations with current fire science methodology and practices to achieve the desired results. Successful implementation of the Plan over time will rely upon information and lessons learned from completed treatment actions and monitoring results that will inform decision-making to identify future site specific prescriptions and actions. To achieve this, the Plan describes a feedback loop at the program level to incorporate lessons learned from fuel treatment and vegetation management activities. Implementation of the Plan is intended to be a dynamic process, where adjustments can be made as needed to continually improve EBRPD's progress toward the goals and objectives identified in this Plan. As EBRPD moves forward in addressing wildfire hazards in the Study Area, better-informed decision making will lead to more efficient and effective fuel treatment actions, and will ultimately enable EBRPD to achieve its wildfire hazard reduction goals in an ecologically-beneficial and cost-effective manner.