



Acron Jaeger

**Grazing mitigates wildfire near homes bordering Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve, San Ramon**

## Grazing and Grassland Management

The Park District manages over 80,000 acres of grasslands, but funding for this type of fire hazard reduction is less available. Grazing is one of the most effective grassland management techniques for wildfire suppression. Goats can graze in terrain that is difficult for mowers and even cattle to reach. However, goat grazing is costly at \$3,000 – \$5,000 per acre. Additionally, when grassland fires occur, they have the damaging effect of harming the grazing animals, fences and water systems which are not typically accounted for in the “costs” of wildfire impacts. To effectively continue grassland management with grazing, these costs should be reimbursed from emergency funding sources as well as on-going grasslands policies which incentivize conservation efforts.

Managing natural resources for endangered and threatened species can create challenges regarding where and when vegetation management can take place.



**Cattle, sheep and goats provide effective vegetation management in Park District grasslands**

Cali Godley

## Ecologically Sensitive Vegetation Management and Resilient Natural Habitat

The Park District is guided by an environmental ethic in all actions. When conducting vegetation removal to protect against catastrophic wildfires, the Park District’s Stewardship team will intentionally reestablish new growth of a healthy, natural habitat which is more resilient to potential wildfire and drought. This reestablishment is



D. I. Rienschie

**A threatened California red-legged frog**

predominantly funded by the Park District’s Measure FF local tax measure. Currently, FEMA and CAL FIRE grants largely focus primarily on the removal of dry vegetation, but place less of a focus on establishing a resilient habitat. The Park District is coordinating with partner agencies to encourage a stronger focus on healthful habitat reestablishment for a more resilient California.



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**A healthy redwood forest, Roberts Redwood Regional Recreation Area, Oakland**

### Government and Legislative Affairs

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**On the Cover:** Wildfire Vegetation Management at Anthony Chabot Regional Park, Castro Valley

## Wildfire Vegetation Management and Safe Healthy Forests



# The Oakland Hills Firestorm Forever Changed the Park District's Relationship with Fire

The East Bay Regional Park District (Park District) has a strong relationship with managing vegetation in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). In 1991, the tragic Oakland hills firestorm – then the most destructive fire in California history – resulted in \$1.5 billion in initial damages, many lives lost and over 3,000 homes destroyed. Park District staff were the first responders to this incident – risking their lives to fight the fire. More recently wildfires in California continue to increase in frequency and intensity. Investing in vegetation management allows for long term cost savings, reduced community displacement and minimizes risk of catastrophic wildfires. Using the best available science, such investments will also protect habitat, air quality, water supply and water quality.

Homes burning in the 1991 Oakland Hills Firestorm

## Managing Vegetation in the Wildland-Urban Interface

Minimizing the risk of wildfire on over 125,000 acres of urban-adjacent wildlands is among the highest priorities for the Park District. The Park District's collaboration with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), CAL FIRE and elected officials has supported significant funding for the Park District's on-going vegetation management practices. This work has enabled a significant reduction in flammable wildland vegetation and has helped to mitigate the potential of a catastrophic fire event.

Annually, the Park District invests over \$10 million of local, state and Federal funding toward managing and diminishing hazardous vegetation in the East Bay. As a result of this work, the risk of catastrophic fire has been greatly reduced.



Left to Right: EBRPD Resources Analyst Kristen Van Dam, Fire Chief Aileen Theile, and Bay Area Tree Specialist owner Richard Smith planning flammable vegetation removal



EBRPD firefighters battle a wildfire

## Wildfire Response

The role of firefighters across the state is critical for the safety of all Californians. The Park District's Fire Department is an important component of overall parkland operations, as well as the region's public safety. This is especially significant considering many of the Park District's lands are in the WUI. The Park District is uniquely situated to fight fires with wildland scale equipment and infrastructure – including helicopter water dropping capability. During wildfire events, two helicopters stand ready to protect our natural resources, whether on parklands, or in neighboring communities. Continued resources are needed for fire suppression equipment, as well as mitigation.



EBRPD and CAL FIRE extinguish an urban interface wildfire

## Tree Mortality Elevated Wildfire Risk

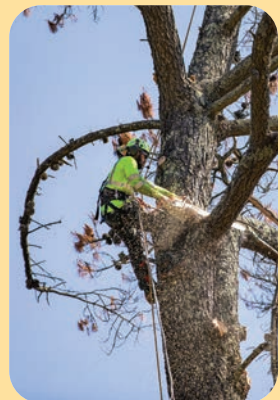
Since October 2020, the Park District has been impacted by a sudden onset of tree mortality and dieback on over 1,500 acres of parklands. The suspected cause of tree mortality include impacts of drought, extreme heat and/or newly introduced pathogens due to climate change. Dead and dying



Aerial views of pine and redwood die off

trees are major fire hazards as their airborne embers can spread widely. Cost of flammable vegetation treatments, reduction and tree removals is in the multiple millions. The Park District is accelerating the work, but more funding is needed to address this public safety concern. In addition, further analysis is needed aimed at understanding the full extent and best approach for addressing the tree mortality caused by drought and climate change.

State and Federal governments have an obligation to take more of a leadership role, provide funding to eradicate the vegetation and identify long term solutions as the climate continues to change. The Park District seeks support from Congress and the State Legislature to fund the removal of the vegetation expeditiously.



Park firefighter removes a dead tree