FOREST HEALTH AND FUEL REDUCTION AT HUDDART & WUNDERLICH PARKS

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated November 17, 2021

What does 'treatment' entail?

In treatment areas crews work to selectively thin overdense stands of trees. Beneath the forest canopy, trees 8 inches or fewer in diameter are removed, while in the open the same sized trees are selectively thinned to a distance of 15 to 20 feet apart. Standing dead trees that are 12 inches or fewer in diameter and pose significant hazard are removed. The intention is not to clear vegetation but to reduce its density.

Since only small trees beneath the canopy are removed and mature trees remain, the canopy is not greatly affected. Measurements of canopy cover recorded throughout the areas treated so far show no loss in density or overstory vegetation cover.

The specifications for this work include the preservation of significant stands of native vegetation, such as huckleberry, toyon, and hazelnut, which provide important habitat for native animals.

How were the treatment areas selected?

These projects are part of a large-scale forest restoration effort throughout the region. As such, treatment areas were chosen in the interest of maximizing forest resiliency, protecting the watershed, and, with consultation from the local CAL FIRE unit, improving community safety from wildfire. Areas with a less than 30% slope were chosen because we are able to treat them mechanically and thus cost-effectively, allowing us to treat more area overall.

How is this project being funded and what are the costs of treatment?

From grants awarded by CAL FIRE to our partner, the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, 2.5 million dollars has been allocated for forest restoration at Huddart and Wunderlich parks. The cost of mechanical treatment is approximately $4,000 per acre.

What efficacy does this treatment have against the spread of wildfire?

Many factors decide how a fire behaves. Weather and topography are beyond our ability to control, but fuel, i.e. vegetation, both the type of vegetation and its structure, is one factor that can be controlled to decrease fire risk. The smaller fuel load of a thinned understory can lessen a fire's duration and intensity, can slow its spread, and by the removal of 'ladder fuels' can give less opportunity for flames to climb into the forest canopy. Opening vegetation around roads also allows community members to escape a wildfire and firefighters to get to it.

Does this project include removing vegetation beneath the SLAC power lines on the south side of Wunderlich Park?

While some areas slated for treatment do abut these power lines, the full removal of vegetation beneath the lines is not within the scope of this project. Limiting factors include the slope of the terrain and proximity to water courses.

Are there plans for future projects in which hand crews will treat areas that were not treated during this project because they were too steep?

More forest health and fire fuel reduction efforts are planned for Huddart and Wunderlich Parks. Treatment priorities include areas near park boundaries, trails, facilities and infrastructure.

Why are masticators being used? And what will be done with the masticated material?

For a large-scale project such as this, masticators (mobile wood chippers) are far more cost effective than other means and allow us to treat the greatest possible area with the funds available to us.

Masticators do not dig; they remove only above-ground vegetation and move on tracks that cause minimal disturbance to the ground. Masticated material will remain in the treatment area and will create a mulch layer that is beneficial for suppressing weeds.

Will the heavy equipment used in this project damage the soil?

These vehicles are designed to have good weight distribution in order to minimize soil disruption. The ground pressure for on-site vehicles is as follows, in pounds per square inch (psi):

- Pickup truck – 25–35 psi
- Timber Pro TL735C with 24" wide tracks – 7.1 psi
- Prime Tech PT-300 – 4.25 psi
- Caterpillar 259 D skidsteer – 4.8–6 psi
- Morbark Beever M15R Tracked chipper – 4.84 psi
- Human footprint – ~8 psi

The project specifications include repairs where needed to disturbed soil and erosion controls.

What type of oversight will there be for the contractor performing the fuel reduction work?

The contractor will work in cooperation with our Natural Resource Management staff, the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, and our consultant forester. Through regular contact we will ensure the contractor complies with best management practices, that sensitive resources are avoided, and that the work remains within scope.

Does the term 'treatment,' when used for this project, ever mean chemical treatment and use of herbicides?

'Treatment' means any method of vegetation management, including mechanical, manual, biological (i.e. grazing), or chemical methods. While nearly all of this project involves mechanical methods, such as masticators, in locations where we see invasive species regrowth or where invasive species are a concern, herbicides will be a tool in our toolbox, since this is often the most effective method for long-term control of invasives. San Mateo County Parks uses a targeted-only approach, where herbicides are applied directly to the targeted species as a spot treatment, never a broadcast treatment. We also follow specific pest control recommendations for what herbicide formulations are most appropriate.

Will neighbors be informed when chemical treatments are performed?

When applying chemical treatments in the vicinity of trails or recreation areas, we will post advisories within the park and/or on our website. We will close these areas for the day while the herbicide is applied and reopen only after the herbicide has dried.

What is the plan for maintaining the project area?

County Parks staff will monitor the project area regularly to observe regrowth and determine long-term maintenance needs. Certain species that regrow, like invasive broom or other fast-growing non-native species, will need quick follow-up treatment. Some native shrubs and slower growing species may not be of concern for up to five years. Maintenance activities will likely be performed in phases to allow us to focus on smaller sections of the total project area and to maintain the project benefits over the long term with less disruption to the park and its habitats.

Will work stop when birds are nesting from late winter to spring?

Treatments for this year are planned to begin in July, during nesting season, and will continue through winter as weather conditions allow. Bird nesting usually ends by the end of summer. For work that is determined to be feasible during the nesting season, surveys for any nesting birds will be performed in advance of treatment. Active nests will be flagged and a protective buffer established. The nest will be monitored until it's no longer in use, at which time workers will return to the area.

The project is planned during the summer months, when weather conditions are dry and windy (i.e. red flag days). What measures are in place to prevent a fire from starting from equipment operation?

Crews will have wind-and-humidity measuring equipment on hand, and are required to monitor weather conditions on a daily basis. If conditions are hot and dry, a crew member will be assigned to stay on site to watch for fire hazards or fire-related concerns. The contractor will also have fire suppression equipment and water on site at all times.

Will trails or recreation areas within the park be closed during this project?

Trails will be periodically closed while work is being performed. Check the Parks Department website (SMCoParks.org) for trail closure advisories. San Mateo County Parks will also use this opportunity to make modifications to Huddart Park's Toyon Campgrounds, which will reopen in 2022.

Is there an opportunity for public comment on the chosen treatment areas?

Project scoping and environmental review have been completed for this project as part of the grant application process. No modifications to the treatment area are currently planned.