



July 29, 2015

NorCal SAF, Bay Area Chapter
PO Box 1013
Jackson, CA 95642

Dear NorCal SAF Members,

Save East Bay Hills is a citizen's action group comprised of Oakland hills residents working to stop the FEMA funded deforestation of East Bay public lands by the East Bay Regional Parks District (EBRPD), the City of Oakland, and U.C. Berkeley (UCB). The focus of our group is singular: to increase public awareness about the plan by alerting people to the language of the FEMA Environmental Impact Statement prescribing the scope of the work to be done and educating people about why the various rationales being used to justify this tragic decimation of our forests are disingenuous and problematic. Under increasing scrutiny, the three agencies have begun to distance themselves from past statements, the explicit terms of their proposal, and the FEMA grant they have each already agreed and/or voted to implement. In other words, they are intentionally spreading misinformation in the hope of quelling public backlash against their plan to destroy our collectively owned forests.

On June 2, 2015, for example, we attended a press conference at the North Oakland Sports Complex near the Caldecott Tunnel where Vince Crudele, the Vegetation Manager for the Oakland Fire Department who is in charge of this project, stood adjacent to the soccer field and, pointing to the Eucalyptus forest compromised of many thousands of trees growing on the hills behind him, explained how the City of Oakland would be cutting down each of those trees and repeatedly covering their stumps in herbicides. While he attempted to portray the removal of the forest as "thinning" because the work would be spread out over three subsequent years, he admitted that at the end of those three years, the entire grove of trees behind him would be gone. He explained that another FEMA project area to be targeted by the City - the 66 acres of public land spanning the Caldecott Tunnel - would receive similar treatment.

Yet in spite of the information conveyed at this press conference, other Oakland officials - most notably Dan Kalb, the plan's most ardent supporter on the City Council - have since begun to deny that forests will be clear cut. Kalb is also claiming that the use of herbicides is uncertain, in direct contravention not only of the information provided by the City's Vegetation Manager, but the terms of the FEMA grant which specifically call for the conversion of forest to grassland and herbicide spread:

3.4.2.3.2 Caldecott Tunnel-PDM (Oakland) ... Oakland's goal for Caldecott Tunnel-PDM is conversion from a eucalyptus-dominated forest to annual grassland ... To suppress resprouting of eucalyptus, the cambium ring of stumps would be treated with a combination of Garlon4 and Stalker in a solution of methylated seed oil, water, and marking dye. All eucalyptus resprouts and eucalyptus seedlings would receive follow-up treatment with Garlon4, Stalker, or Roundup twice a year.

Likewise, despite explicit language in the FEMA EIS which states that U.C. Berkeley will be cutting down vast numbers of trees at Strawberry Canyon (56.3 acres) and Claremont Canyon (42.8 acres), UCB is also telling the public and journalists who contact them that no specific determination has been made as to how many will be destroyed. This is clearly contradicted by the FEMA EIS which states:

"ES.7.2.2 The UCB grant application includes two project areas in which approximately 22,000 ... trees would be cut down, including most eucalyptus, Monterey pine, and acacia trees."

Those areas are:

“ES.1.1 UCB -UCB submitted two grant applications under the PDM program: one for a 56.3-acre area designated Strawberry Canyon-PDM in this EIS and one for a 42.8-acre area ... Claremont-PDM.”

Similarly, in response to public concerns expressed to the EBRPD about this plan, EBRPD Fire Chief Dan McCormick has been attempting to quell public fears by making several false statements about the number of trees which will be cut down in our parks and the application of herbicides which will follow - statements which not only contradict the terms of the FEMA grant, but the name of one of the herbicides to be spread, the manner in which that herbicide will be applied, and the amount of chemicals that will be used.

Ignoring the language of the FEMA grant which calls for the removal of “*entire groves*” of healthy Monterey Pine, Monterey Cypress, Eucalyptus and Acacia trees growing on EBRPD ridge lines and up to 90% of trees in other targeted areas, the EBRPD is claiming that they will merely be “*thinning*” dead and dying trees and brush. In addition, not only is McCormick calling the herbicide by its wrong name - “*Garland*” instead of “*Garlon*” - undermining any faith that the EBRPD has actually studied the evidence regarding the danger this and other chemicals pose to wildlife, park visitors and nearby residents, his claim that herbicides will be spread with a brush rather than by spraying contradicts both the manufacturer's instructions as well as the terms of the FEMA grant which specifically prescribe spraying.

Equally alarming is McCormick's claim that a mere 15 gallons of this chemical will be used on the 1,605 acres and hundreds of thousands of tree stumps that will be created, an amount that dramatically contrasts with the much larger amount used by the EBRPD for much smaller projects in the past. EBRPD itself indicates that from 2011 to 2014, 157 gallons of *Triclopyr (Garlon)* were used. With the plan to cut down hundreds of thousands of trees pending, it is simply impossible that they will use less than that.

Moreover, public records indicate that from 2001-2003, U.C. Berkeley chopped down 18,000 trees and subsequently spread 141 gallons of herbicides in the region through 2012. Applying this amount to the estimated number of trees to be cut down by all three partnering agencies and the plan itself which allows application of herbicides up to twice a year on stumps and on the brush/grass which will inevitably grow in the absence of trees, it is conservatively estimated that over the course of a decade, thousands of gallons of herbicides will be spread on our public lands. This includes Monsanto's *Glyphosate* which the World Health Organization has labeled a “*probable human carcinogen*,” causing officials in Marin County to ban its use on several open spaces in that county and the City of San Francisco to recently reclassify *Glyphosate* as a Tier 1 or “most hazardous” chemical while vowing to reevaluate its use.

We know from our own public outreach, including speaking with our neighbors who live near targeted areas, the comments we receive as a result of our online education, the response we have received from our numerous mailings to targeted neighborhoods, the ads we have placed in the *Oakland Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* and our own leafletting at parks to be targeted under this plan, such as Sibley Volcanic Regional Park where two thirds of the Eucalyptus forest and areas of Pine forest are to be destroyed (3.4.2.3.5 *Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve...EBRPD would convert about two-thirds of the eucalyptus forest and smaller amounts of ... pine forest... to ... grassland*), that when informed, the public is overwhelmingly opposed to the prescribed deforestation (FEMA admits that 90% of the 13,000 comments received were opposed). However, we have been unable to get the Bay Area media to move beyond a superficial treatment of this important issue even though its outcome will have such a profound impact upon the lives of so many East Bay residents - human and non-human alike.

Indeed, FEMA itself admits that this plan will result in “*unavoidable adverse impacts... to vegetation, wildlife and habitats, protected species, soils, water quality, aesthetics, community character, human health and safety, recreation, and noise.*” As a result, the East Bay public will be forced to endure 11 *guaranteed* harms to eliminate the risk of a very remote one - fire - by the implementation of a plan that in reality will exacerbate rather than decrease that very risk. Yet the multi-faceted nature of the threat presented by this plan is never discussed by the local media, with journalistic treatment of this issue never venturing beyond a one-dimensional but safe approach that simplistically reduces the debate to human lives versus trees. While this allows local media to avoid any appearance of indifference to public safety or insensitivity to the tragic loss suffered by families in the 1991 fire, it is a great disservice to their mission of keeping the public informed about important issues that will directly impact them and is to blame for how the pending destruction has gotten this far. Not only have members of the public been denied the information that would allow them to make fully informed opinions and to understand the true extent of the devastation that is to come, they have also been denied the opportunity to consent as to whether they *want* to convert our public forests into grassland. In-

stead, they have been given a plan that claims to be about fire abatement but which in truth is about something else entirely: the radical transformation of our cherished public lands to suit the narrow, personal preferences of the few who favor “native” trees.

Another issue compounding the superficial treatment of this issue by the media is the ponderous nature of the FEMA EIS document itself, which is many several hundred pages long. Rather than take the time and effort to comb the documents to find out what it actually prescribes, the media has chosen to simply repeat the statements of public officials with no effort to fact check, allowing such officials to get away with spreading misinformation, most notably downplaying the vast number of trees which will be lost - over 400,000 - and the amount of chemicals to be spread. More than once, journalists we have spoken to have gone on to write stories merely parroting erroneous statements made by plan proponents after admitting to us that the daunting nature of the FEMA document precludes them from reading it for themselves.

Because of these various factors working in tandem - the deliberate misrepresentation of the plan by its proponents, the reluctance of the media to challenge the fire abatement and “native plant” rationales, to consider the other harms that will result from this plan or to fact check statements made by public officials - **we are writing to direct your members to some of the most helpful documents on our website which provide information they are unlikely to get from the media, from the City of Oakland, the EBRPD, UCB, or individuals who promote this plan who might be speaking at your upcoming event. These include:**

- our factsheet which responds to various misrepresentations about the plan - <http://goo.gl/AX5uWZ>
- an article about the historical and cultural significance of East Bay forests - <http://goo.gl/ldgGlq>
- our page dispelling common myths and misrepresentations about Eucalyptus trees, including the false claims that they are peculiarly flammable, discourage biodiversity and that those in the East Bay Hills are at the end of their lifespan - <http://goo.gl/IsP3IK>
- a copy of a report written by Dave Maloney, a former Oakland firefighter, former Chief of Fire Prevention for the Oakland Army base and member of the Emergency Task Force convened after the 1991 fire who opposes this plan and calls it “*land transformation disguised as a wildfire hazard mitigation plan. If it is implemented it will endanger firefighters and the general public; and it will be an outrageous waste of taxpayer money.*” He also calls the claims being made about the peculiar flammability of Eucalyptus trees unfounded, and writes that such claims are driven not by fire science, but a “native” plant agenda which puts:

“ideological... considerations ahead of the safety of firefighters and the public, and gives rise to propagandistic statements which are designed to scare the public, which have no basis in fire science... Fire Science has proven that every living tree -- regardless of its species -- due to its moisture content and canopy coverage of ground fuels, contributes to wildfire hazard mitigation.”

- His plan also proposes a true fire abatement plan for the hills, one that requires the elimination of ground fuels but which keeps our now pristine forests healthy, in tact, and free of poisons - <http://goo.gl/hm9Jp8>
- an article challenging the ideology of invasion biology, as more and more environmentalists have begun to do in the wake of similarly destructive campaigns being waged worldwide - <http://goo.gl/5vx7mH>

It is our hope that such materials will provide information that might prove useful to your deliberations about this important issue so that you might follow the lead of the San Francisco Urban Forestry Council whose position in favor of protecting historic, culturally significant Eucalyptus stands and groves in that city apply equally well to the forests of the East Bay.

San Francisco’s Urban Forestry Council writes that it is important for the city to “*Protect and sustain iconic forest stands*” and notes that mature and historic tree stands “*are character defining features of the city that provide unique experiences to those who enjoy them*” and should be “*protected and managed for their cultural and social benefits to residents and visitors.*” Their importance is “*evidenced by community groups formed around the protection and management of these sites.*”

The forests of the East Bay, daily visited by legions of East Bay residents wishing to be amidst the shady hiking trails and spectacular natural beauty created by groves of towering, majestic trees, were planted more than a century and a half ago by the region’s early founders in order to beautify clear cut hillsides decimated during the Gold Rush by timber hungry fortune seekers. Among these planters was the founder of California’s Arbor Day, famed naturalist, “Poet of the Sierras” and friend of John Muir, Joaquin Miller, who planted 75,000 trees in the Oakland hills, primarily Eucalyptus. Through such beautification efforts, Miller and other early Oakland residents bequeathed to us forests that are now a Bay Area treasure, a heritage that should be preserved for the enjoyment and recreation of fu-

ture generations of East Bay residents just as they were preserved by prior ones for ours.

Indeed, in the first half of the 20th century, other Bay Area naturalists such as Robert Sibley, concerned about the loss of public land and their historic forests due to encroaching development, founded the East Bay Regional Parks District with the slogan "Parks for the People," creating some of the very parks now slated for deforestation under this plan. Their goal was to preserve those lands and their forests for the benefit of the many, to protect them from the narrow, personal interests of the few. Their founding documents, which often reference the Eucalyptus and Pine groves of the hills with deep affection, issue a plea for their preservation. They note that the vast Eucalyptus groves of Tilden Park now slated for eradication are the "*keynote of the area*" which provide for East Bay citizens "*excellent picnic areas.*" Forests which, just as today, contained California Bay Laurels and Oak trees amidst Eucalyptus, Monterey Pine, Monterey Cypress and Acacia were not viewed as "native" forests tainted by trees pejoratively referred to as "*invasive,*" but as "*interesting botanic growth both native and exotic.*" Likewise, the Monterey Pine groves now slated for eradication at Robert Sibley Volcanic Preserve were not disdained but seen as vital habitat for the park's wild inhabitants which should be protected, with the EBRPD at the time noting that "*Special effort be made to promote and protect the wildlife in all its forms by not disturbing the natural cover...*" These and other statements found in early EBRPD documents express sentiments of reverence and devotion for our forests and their inhabitants not unlike how most East Bay residents still feel about them, save the few now in charge of overseeing these public lands on our behalf.

The plan by the current leadership of the EBRPD in tandem with Oakland and U.C. Berkeley to undo this legacy of environmental beautification and conservation passed down from prior nature loving Bay Area residents, to deliberately change the very fabric of our parks with a "*long term goal*" of "*eucalyptus and pine conversion,*" is a deep betrayal of the founding vision of our park system. The plan to radically transform our public lands - a plan which FEMA itself admits will cause "*significant alteration of community character,*" which will displace multitudes of animals and destroy the habitat they rely on for shelter, shade, nesting sites and the production of their food supply, which will repeatedly expose animals, park visitors and nearby residents to toxic, carcinogenic herbicides, which will result in the loss of the carbon sequestration and fire abatement now provided by the hundreds of thousands of trees being threatened with destruction, and which will eliminate forever living embodiments of our region's historical heritage - exacts a devastating toll on the many merely to satisfy the narrow, personal prejudices of the few, the very thing EBRPD founders sought to prevent when they set aside the land that is now our park system for the benefit of posterity. It is a responsibility every generation since that founding has honored without equivocation, until now. Will ours be the generation that breaks that trust?

If this plan proceeds and historic and beloved groves of Monterey Pine, Monterey Cypress, Acacia and Eucalyptus trees are reduced to vast seas of chemically treated tree stumps surrounded by staked caution tape and signs warning park visitors to keep out and beware toxic chemicals, the answer to that question will become only too heartbreakingly obvious: *yes.*

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to share the nature of our opposition to this plan.

Sincerely,

Save East Bay Hills