

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. WHY IS A VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPORTANT?

MCOSD is now at a critical juncture in its role as a land and resource manager. Following direction from both the Marin Countywide Plan and the Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan, we are developing a VMP to prioritize and guide our vegetation management efforts to balance the enhancement of our natural resources while we continue to reduce the risk of wildfire.

2. ARE MCOSD'S GOALS AND OBJECTIVES SHARED BY ADJACENT LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES, PARTICULARLY MMWD, AND IS THE MCOSD COLLABORATING WITH MMWD ON THIS EFFORT?

The VMP combines existing goals and objectives that are described in the Marin Countywide Plan, the Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan, adopted MCOSD land management policies, and goals and objectives developed for the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) Vegetation Management Plan. There are similarities between MCOSD and MMWD planning efforts, and goals and objectives; however, despite the similarities in the natural resources and the land management actions on both MCOSD and MMWD lands, the two agencies have very distinct and different mission statements and guiding principles, and therefore MMWD goals and objectives were reviewed, modified, adopted, or discarded as necessary to meet MCOSD's unique mission, goals, and objectives.

3. WILL THE PUBLIC HAVE A CHANCE TO REVIEW AND COMMENT ON THE VMP?

There will be multiple opportunities for the public to provide input throughout this process. In order to involve the public to the fullest extent possible, MCOSD is hosting a series of public meetings throughout the county, and providing information on our website about the process, including public participation opportunities. MCOSD is counting on input from community members as well as other land managers to develop the best possible strategies to balance the need of reducing the risk of wildfire and managing vegetation resources for diversity, connectivity, and resiliency.

4. WHY IS CONTROLLING INVASIVE PLANTS ON MCOSD LANDS SO IMPORTANT?

The invasion of rapidly spreading non-native plants, such as broom, increases the fire danger on MCOSD lands. MCOSD owns and manages 34 preserves throughout Marin from Novato, to Tiburon, to San Geronimo Valley, with most of our preserves surrounded by developed areas. The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) occurs at the intersection of the developed and the undeveloped, natural watershed lands. Devastating fires in Marin and other parts of California, such as the 1991 Oakland Hills fire, the 1995 Vision fire and even the notorious 1929 Mt. Tamalpais fire (in which a large part of Mill Valley was destroyed), have taught us that the risk of fire in the WUI is extremely high. The more MCOSD can do to reduce invasive plants, the safer those communities will be from fire.

Also, over the past two decades, Marin County Fire installed miles of fuel breaks along ridge tops between the developed communities. For the most part, these fuelbreaks have not been adequately maintained due to a lack of resources. These fuel breaks are important to the safety of lives and property in neighboring communities, and to the firefighters who will use them should a fire occur. The non-native plants that are taking hold within these fuel break areas - again broom - can be highly flammable and are spreading faster than we can stop them.

5. WHAT ARE THE OTHER RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FIRE?

A catastrophic fire carries its own risks. In the event of a fire, fire retardant chemicals could be broadcast over a wide area. Beyond the dangers to human life, homes, and property, the risks to the environment are severe, and include soil erosion, air pollution, permanent loss of mature trees, wildlife fatalities, and long-term visual impacts.

6. WHAT OTHER RISKS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE SPREAD OF INVASIVE PLANTS?

Invasive plants are threatening the unique biological diversity of the local ecosystem. MCOSD preserves are home to many rare and endangered plant species, many of which are found only on in Marin. If native plant species are pushed out by weeds, some of them will be lost forever. A variety of non-native, invasive plants, notably French broom, yellow star thistle, pampas grass, and barbed goatgrass are overtaking the native plants, altering the ecosystem permanently and eliminating habitat that provides food and shelter for birds and animals. MCOSD's mission includes responsible stewardship to preserve biological diversity for public enjoyment now and in the future.

7. WHAT OTHER CONTROL METHODS IS MCOSD USING TO MANAGE VEGETATION AND INVASIVE WEEDS?

Currently we are using these approaches to control weeds: Mechanical mowing, hand removal (including volunteer labor), controlled burning, high-intensity heat/ propane flame, and chemical controls

We have also evaluated these other means to control weeds: goat and/or sheep grazing and biological control

8. HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THE CURRENT WEED CONTROL EFFORTS?

All of the methods listed above have proven to be limited in their effectiveness. Taken together, these techniques have not solved the problem of invasive plants, nor can they be used in all locations where weeds have spread. Mechanical mowing reduces the fuel load temporarily, but allows the weeds to spread even further. Hand pulling is effective in certain locations when weed patches are small and soil conditions are wet. Propane flaming is effective when plants are small and soil conditions are wet. Controlled burns are effective, but limited to certain types of weather. They cannot be used repeatedly without damaging native plants. Infestations are spreading quickly.

9. WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE ABOUT IINVASIVE PLANTS?

There are three basic aspects of weed control that also apply to invasive weeds: prevention, eradication, and management.

Prevention Rather than waiting for an invasive plant to become a problem, it is much more cost effective to prevent potential weeds from entering an area and becoming established or naturalized. A stitch in time...

Eradication - Early Detection and Rapid Response Eradication refers to the complete elimination of a weed. The principle behind eradication is to stop the plant before it reproduces or spreads. After prevention, eradicating a small population of an invasive weed is the most cost effective control tactic. Many of MCOSD's weed eradication efforts have been very successful and have kept small weed incursions from becoming widespread problems. Eradication has two components: early detection and rapid response.

Invasive Plant Management The control of invasive plants includes methods such as mechanical, chemical, cultural, and biological controls. Some management options used to control invasive weeds are not generally available in urban or agricultural landscapes. Examples are prescribed burning, grazing, re-vegetation programs, and much more extensive use of biological control agents. In most cases, integrated approaches using combinations of these methods are more effective for long-term suppression of invasive weeds and for recovery of the land to a more functional and productive ecosystem.