

## Report of Disaster Preparedness Ad Hoc Committee 3/22/21

*Gregg Dieguez, Jill Grant, Dan Haggerty*

We had a teleconference with Nick Calderon, head of SMC Parks; spoke with several concerned MidCoast residents; attended the [Fire Safe San Mateo County](#) (FSSMC) meeting & joined the group, and reviewed materials on wildfire hazards and fuel reduction. Our findings and concerns are summarized below, followed by more detailed notes:

- A. San Mateo County Parks estimates about \$60 million to remove and replant the eucalyptus in Quarry Park. This year, they have budgeted a total of \$1.2 million in 3 projects related to Quarry Park this year, to maintain the clearing done in prior projects and to create fire breaks in new areas. There is concern that their plans are not sufficiently detailed in maps and text. SMC parks is not responsible for eucalyptus on Highway 1 and 92 that could block evacuation. Calderon will review a detailed map of "paper streets" in El Granada if we send him one, and will advise whether those are Parks' responsibility. Eucalyptus on medians in El Granada is not Parks' responsibility; it may be DPW or residents'.
- B. A review of the [FEMA after-action report on the 1991 Oakland Hills fire](#), the Paradise fire, and the CZU lightning fire last year indicate that the MidCoast faces a similar high wildfire risk, but with less evacuation and shelter options, and a similar lack of fuel reduction preparation. Concern is that a Quarry Park wildfire may be indefensible under the wrong conditions (e.g. canopy fire).
- C. A successful eucalyptus fuel reduction program was undertaken in San Diego, completing in 2015 after a 12 year effort. It was stimulated by a local parcel tax and boosted by federal funds. Both Calderon and Horsley are reviewing that report. Supr. Horsley has mentioned special assessment districts in other contexts (e.g. Medio Creek erosion) and noted that a County parcel tax for the climate crisis and other risks is being contemplated.
- D. The Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) is being updated this year after 5 years. As a result of our efforts this past week, I believe all eligible MidCoast agencies are now annex partners (SAM is not, but the member agencies are). The LHMP may be a major funding vehicle for several disaster preparedness and resiliency initiatives.
- E. We suggest that County and Agency staff be involved to:
  1. Ratify the level of wildfire risk in Quarry Park, and related eucalyptus stands.
  2. Assign the risk mitigation efforts – including funding – for immediate action, beginning with Quarry Park and following with other priorities identified by the MCC.
  3. Include the MCC in research and deliberations of the LHMP and other initiatives that may resolve the numerous disaster risks faced by the MidCoast. This could involve the creation of an adjunct group of local residents with expertise and interest, which several have expressed.

F. We recommend that the MCC:

1. Invite the appropriate County/Agency staff to an MCC meeting to address specific issues mentioned above, which we shall document after Council discussion.
  - a. **Possible Topics for County to address during a future meeting:**
    - i. SMC: Present the plan to eradicate the ~355 acres of invasive and non-native eucalyptus trees from Quarry Park and similar areas (list TBD) along the midcoast. Specifically provide a timeline, steps, and where the money will come from - measure K? CalFire grants? Parcel Tax? What was done in Quarry Park last year? What is the plan for the next 5 years?
    - ii. CalFire: What is the current plan to contain a wildfire in Quarry Park such as the CZU? How do people evacuate the area - routes? Will they use hydrants, fire trucks, helicopter?
    - iii. Kellyx from the RCD - describe the CEQA programmatic approach that is in the works for Quarry Park. Where are they in the process and when will it be available for the public to review and comment on?
    - iv. Nicholas Calderon, San Mateo county parks and recreation - In 2019 100 acres of Quarry Park was treated. Using a map show the areas where treatment was completed. What was the treatment and what maintenance will be required to upkeep this area?
    - v. CalFire, CalTrans, GGNRA, Others?: List the actions planned for eucalyptus treatment and/or removal within your jurisdiction on the Mid Coast.
    - vi. Nicholas Calderon, San Mateo county parks and recreation & Jonathan Cox, CalFire - please share the 14 point priority report by Hannah and the natural resource team which was used to rank the list of priority fuel reduction projects in San Mateo County and compare/contrast Quarry Park to the other 32 priority projects.
    - vii. RCD, SMC, CalFire - what are potential sources of funding to eradicate eucalyptus from the mid coast? Measure K, CDFW grants, CalFire, parcel tax?
  - b. **Possible County Presenters**
    - i. Supervisor Don Horsley
    - ii. Kellyx Nelson from RCD
    - iii. Nicolas Calderon from SMC Parks & Rec.
    - iv. Jonathan Cox from CalFire
    - v. Caltrans, GGNRA, Others: TBD
2. Create a more complete list of Disaster preparedness issues in consultation with residents and county/agency staff. Determine which agencies are responsible for each. Request plans and status reports from each agency for each area.
3. Invite interested residents to assist with related research and communication efforts.

----- Meeting Notes -----

Nick Calderon, Gregg Dieguez, Jill Grant, Dan Haggerty, Shauna Pickett-Gordon

Thurs. March 18, 3pm

- A. San Diego seems to have solved the eucalyptus problem, back in 2014-15. Why can't we do what they did? (attachment) *Nick is researching this.*
- B. It does not appear that the fuel reduction planned for the MidCoast comes close to the level of wildfire protection needed to prevent another Oakland Hills or Paradise fire.

1a. What is the plan for fire fuel reduction in Quarry Park? Where does it fall on the spectrum of activities from:

- clearing underbrush to suppress ground fires
- topping trees to prevent crown fires
- taking down trees
- removing stumps
- providing erosion control
- replanting with native species

*Maintaining prior ground clearing is in the current plans, along with extending fire breaks.*

1b. What are the cost estimates for items in 1a?

*GAD comment: It looks like a little under \$1.2m for Quarry Park in 3 projects, plus a little under \$1.5m for invasive species near Pillar Ridge. Why is the latter a priority compared to more in Quarry Park?*

1c. What funding sources are being considered for items in 1a? *County Funds*

1d. Resident comment: *"I see Quarry Park mentioned three times on the list of projects (#s 2, 8, and 16), but I don't have a good sense of whether the specific areas connect, or how wildfire in those areas would affect homes, getting to Hwy 1, or general emergency evacuation."*

1e. What single page on Parks' website should we be periodically reviewing to understand Parks' wildfire risk reduction plans and progress?

1f. What happened to the Quarry Park Master Plan? Is the wildfire situation reason to focus a new plan?

<http://www.midcoastcommunitycouncil.org/quarry-park/>

2. What is our risk with and without planned fuel reduction efforts?

a. Who documents the disaster risk in lives and dollars - wildfire, evacuation, and other causes (e.g. tsunami)? Where are those documents?

b. Has the Quarry Park fire hazard been ranked recently for risk (e.g. since last thinning)?

*GAD Comment: I suspect the updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan will say something about this issue, but the plans won't be published until Dec. 2021, and that's wasting time when we need action now (actually, efforts have been ongoing for years, but appear insufficient).*

3. What other wildfire risks on the MidCoast are Parks' responsibility?

a. - Eucs on medians in El Granada like Alhambra & Alameda? *Per Nick NOT PARKS*

b. - 'Paper' Streets in El Granada? *GET HIM A MAP – PROBABLY NOT. If HOMES THERE not County. IF roads are potential evacuation routes and go through Parks, maybe.*

- Lewis Ave
- Ave Portola
- Dolphine Ave
- Highland Ave
- Montecito Ave

c. Resident comment: *"Where trees on unimproved County road easement property may pose a fire or fall threat to an existing home(s) (perhaps within 100'), the County's position may not provide adequate cover from liability exposure should reasonable evidence show a lack of maintenance response on their part contributed to any significant private property loss or loss of life."*

d. Resident comment: *"Since Quarry Park Fuel Break was listed #16 on the CAL FIRE Priority list in Feb 2019 not a single mature eucalyptus has been removed from Quarry Park. Projects that have been performed could be described as trail or park improvements and have certainly not made me feel any safer."*

e. What are the current risk rankings of all Park's wildfire areas?

*Implication of the criteria in a recent Parks presentation is that there is some spreadsheet, please provide.*

f. What are the \$\$\$ planned for each of 3e.?

*The screenshot below has the priority projects for the current budget, but there are more.*

4. What can we do to help Parks (or SMC as a whole) get a Quarry Park eucalyptus removal and replanting project moving and funded?

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**Jill's notes:**

**Quarry Park (priorities in 5-year wildlife management plan)**

- 1) 2019 completed governor's maintenance project by Calfire - clearing understory, thinning out rows for fuel breaks, retreating the area. If no maintenance it would only take a few years to have ladder fuel and high danger again.
- 2) Removing larger trees in Quarry Park and Mirada East - this is new work to eliminate ladder fuel and create new fuel breaks.
- 3) Mirada East clean up - open up the streets by thinning out understory and cutting smaller trees to keep evacuation areas clear.

## **Nick Calderon responses**

2021 - 1st year of 5 year program.

SMC has 4 contractors on-call to perform work with some work being done in-house.

If it is a county park then it is the county parks responsibility.

~\$50 to 60 million to clear Quarry Park and it would have to be phased over years.

El Granada Blvd - removal of trees would cause landslides and ruin people's homes.

We can reduce the vegetation and ladder fuels and over time build on the work you've done to see less and less vegetation but first we have to get the regrowth under control.

\$130,000 per acre to remove eucalyptus

Can the Oakland Hills Fire happen here (Gregg)? He is interested in reaching out to San Diego.

\*paperstreet with homes is not county or dept. of public works responsibility.

Shauna asked for streets to be labeled on the maps provided by Nick.

## **Restoring From Eucalyptus - Lessons Learned in San Diego presentation by Kelly Sypolt (NRCS Conservation Planner/Forester), Sarah Godfrey (Center for Natural Lands Management), and Stacy McCline (Del Dios Habitat Protection League)**

Their approach took 12 years to reduce wildfire risk and improve wildlife habitat. They first generated seed money with a parcel fee then obtained additional funds from Center for Natural Lands Management - Funded by Farm Bill's Conservation Program – Environmental Quality Incentives Program – Initiative for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

### **PARTNERS:**

Natural Resources Conservation Service

City of Encinitas

State of California Wildlife Conservation Board

### **CHALLENGES**

\*Treatment Timing is a challenge– October/November when trees go into dormancy, nesting bird season, fire season, follow-up planting and retreatments

\* Access

\* Biomass removal is greatest challenge

\*Biomass removal is more expensive and complex than felling or treatment

\*Use mulch/material on site whenever possible

\*Using [Cal Fire Camp crews](#) for most effective labor

\*Need CEQA to be in place

\*Exemption for less than 5 acres for restoration purposes – Section 1533; 60-day turnaround

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

Phase project:

- Leverage matching funds that allow for phasing.
- Have the work plan organized for different award amounts per acre and paces of work; prepare contingency plans.
- Monitor crews daily.
- Conduct “test plots” to establish time/acre and amount of trees removed in that time given access restrictions and best management practices; employ adaptive management of funds and timing base on outcome of phasing
- Continually engage community