Figure 1 Proposed Project Location

Purpose and Need

Date: July 29, 2024

Project: Southern Marin Zone Southern Marin Forest Health and Fuel Reduction Project

Categorical Exemption Summary

The Southern Marin Fire District (SMFD) as the lead agency under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) has determined that the Southern Marin Zone Southern Marin Forest Health and Fuel Reduction Project (proposed project) is categorically exempt under CEQA Guidelines Section 15333, Class 33, for Small Habitat Restoration Projects. A Class 33 exempt project consists of projects not to exceed 5 acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife. The proposed project includes vegetation treatment consisting primarily of thinning and/or removal of 22 eucalyptus trees primarily on two parcels in the town of Tiburon owned by the Congregation Kol Shofar and Vista Tiburon homeowners association with some smaller portions on private properties. Approximately 8 of the 22 eucalyptus trees would be removed, and the remaining eucalyptus trees would be limbed to reduce ladder fuels within the fuel reduction zone.

Blue gum eucalyptus is the predominant non-native, invasive tree species in the treatment area. Blue gum eucalyptus is highly flammable and promotes fire spread including heavy litter fall, flammable oils in the foliage, and open crowns bearing pendulous branches (Colwell, 1973; Skolman & Ledig, 1990; Gill M. A., 1977; Gill, Groves, & Noble, 1981). The California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) gives blue gum eucalyptus an overall negative ecological impact rating of "moderate" due to its ability to displace native plant communities, and alter fire regimes, groundwater availability, and habitat for birds (Cal-IPC, 2015). Dense blue gum eucalyptus in an area adjacent to communities and open spaces designated as moderate and high fire hazard severity can increase fire hazard (CAL FIRE, 2007/2008). The scope of the proposed project shown in Figure 1 is consistent with the removal of non-native, invasive, fire-hazardous species to improve habitat conditions and reduce fire hazards within the fuel reduction zone.

The following analysis demonstrates the proposed project would not result in adverse environmental effects, supporting the Southern Marin Fire District's determination that the proposed activities are categorically exempt under CEQA. The proposed project would be conducted in compliance with applicable federal, State, and local regulations and under contractual provisions prohibiting work in violation of applicable regulations and plans.

Information regarding the purpose and need for the proposed project, a description of proposed activities, a discussion of why the potential exceptions to a categorical exemption do not apply here, and an assessment of the potential for environmental effects are provided below.

The purpose of the proposed project would be to reduce unhealthy, fire-hazardous, invasive blue gum forest on a densely vegetated area that is adjacent to residential neighborhoods. While the proposed project would remove 8 eucalyptus trees, most of the trees within the fuel reduction area would remain, and native habitat would be improved from invasive species removal. The proposed project would reduce the potential of a wildfire to occur and reduce wildfire intensity and rate of spread in the event of ignition in the wildland or built environment. Removal of fire-hazardous, invasive species is intended to reduce fire hazards to adjacent communities as well as to decrease the potential for reinvasion of eucalyptus trees in the fuel reduction zone. Additionally, removing invasive, non-natives and replanting with native vegetation would provide an opportunity for native, less hazardous plant species to recolonize and restore these areas to more natural habitat.

Project Description

Treatment Area

Treatment for the proposed project would occur on approximately 2.2 acres and would involve eucalyptus limbing, thinning, and removal primarily on two parcels in the town of Tiburon owned by the Congregation Kol Shofar and Vista Tiburon homeowners association. Hazardous eucalyptus trees would be targeted. An International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist (WE-13197A) surveyed the project area on April 12, 2024, and identified 8eucalyptus trees for removal and 14 eucalyptus trees for thinning due to safety concerns to nearby residences and the Kol Shofar building.

The fuel reduction treatment would focus on the removal of dead and downed material and invasive, non-native plant and trees species within the treatment area. The project area is primarily characterized by non-native eucalyptus forest. Treatment within the eucalyptus forest would be conducted by a hand crew using manual and mechanical tools. Approximately 8 eucalyptus trees within the treatment area would be removed. The remaining 14 eucalyptus trees would be thinned or removed. Cut stumps would be grind up so the project site could be replanted with native, fire resilient vegetation. Invasive species that are present, such as broom, may be removed by pulling. Treatment would include removing eucalyptus duff and litter beneath the trees. Native trees or plant species within the treatment area would be retained. Herbicide treatment is anticipated to be used on cut stumps to prevent eucalyptus regrowth.

The project site would be replanted with native trees (e.g., farmed oaks, coastal live oaks) and monitored after planting for successful establishment. If the initial replanting is not successful, additional native vegetation would be replanted at the project site.[1] Fuel reduction treatments would avoid wetted streams and wetlands within the project area.

Treatment Method

Project treatments would include handheld and ground-based mechanical equipment including chainsaws, bucket trucks, and chippers. Equipment and vehicles would generally operate on existing roads to transport material to and from the project site. Trees would be directionally felled away from roadways and the Kol Shofar building. Bucket trucks would remove larger diameter material from the roads for transport to staging area. Smaller diameter material would, in most cases, be chipped into trucks on the road. A tracked chipper would be towed to the work areas, depending upon disposal method.

---

[1] Several studies have shown that unconcentrated fog drip and stemflow from eucalyptus trees inhibit germination of annual grass seedlings and California native plant species (Wolf & DiTomaso , 2016; Watson, 2000). It is hypothesized that allelopathy by eucalyptus trees may be influenced by rainfall (Watson, 2000; Lange & Reynolds, 1981). Areas of low rainfall are likely to have concentrated allelopathic chemicals in the upper soil layers, which would result in the inhibition of germination and seedling growth. Conversely, winter rainfall would likely leach allelopathic chemicals into the soil profile.

treatments, using the cut-stump method, which has been the most effective control of sprouting (Cal-IPC, n.d.). Should chemical treatments be applied as part of initial or follow-up treatment, herbicide application would be implemented according to all applicable regulations. Herbicide use in aquatic environments are regulated under the Clean Water Act; however, herbicides as part of the proposed project would be implemented by qualified applicators such that runoff or overspray into the channel would not occur (HAZ-5).

Biomass Processing

Proposed project debris would be disposed of through chipping and broadcasting or chipping and hauling. Approximately 400 tons of material could be disposed of from eucalyptus removal. Disposed debris would be hauled to Marin Resource Recovery Center.

Workers

A single contractor crew would consist of up to 8 workers conducting tree removal activities.

Site Access

Equipment and vehicles would travel on existing roads to the project site. Vehicles and equipment would be staged at the Kol Shofar parking lot. Lane closures would be needed during tree removal activities.

Schedule and Duration

Treatments would be conducted during weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Roadside eucalyptus removal activities are anticipated to start in August 2024 and last approximately 10 days. Replanting of the roadsides would occur in early 2024. Following proposed project implementation, the condition of the project site would be monitored and reassessed by Kol Shofar. Additionally, Southern Marin Fire District staff would assess the site approximately twice a year to evaluate when maintenance is needed.