# Responses to Comments

This chapter presents comments received during the public review period for the draft program environmental impact report (Draft PEIR), which concluded on August 9, 2019. In conformance with Section 15088(a) of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines (State CEQA Guidelines), responses are provided to comments on environmental issues.

## List of Commenters on the Draft PEIR

Table 2-1 presents the list of commenters, including the numerical designation for each comment letter received, the author of the comment letter, and the date of the comment letter. Each comment letter is included in Appendix A of Volume I of this Final PEIR.

Comment letters received after the close of the public review period for the Draft PEIR are listed at the end of Table 2-1 and included in Appendix A of Volume I of this Final PEIR. However, these comment letters do not raise any issues that have not been addressed by comment letters received before the close of the public review period for the Draft PEIR, which are responded to in this chapter. Comments in these letters have not been bracketed, and no responses to comments have been provided. In addition, several comments request that responses be provided to comment letters submitted on prior EIRs for the Vegetation Treatment Program. As stated in the Notice of Availability (NOA) for the CalVTP PEIR, the Board will respond only to comments exclusively pertaining to the CalVTP PEIR filed under State Clearinghouse number 2019012052. This approach is consistent with State CEQA Guidelines provisions for recirculating a whole EIR, as is the case for the CalVTP PEIR (see Section 15088.5[f][1]). Comments on prior EIRs were reviewed; however, many of these comments were duplicated by comments submitted and responded to on the CalVTP Draft PEIR, mooted by the new program description and analysis in the CalVTP PEIR, or adequately addressed as part of the CalVTP Draft PEIR analysis and/or responses to comments on the CalVTP Draft PEIR. Therefore, comments in these letters on prior EIRs have not been bracketed, and no responses to comments have been provided.

Table 2-1 List of Commenters

| Letter No. | Commenter | Date |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | AGENCIES |  |
| A1 | Marin County Fire DepartmentJason Weber, Fire Chief | July 16, 2019 |
| A2 | Orange County Fire AuthorityBrian Fennessy, Fire Chief | July 22, 2019 |
| A3 | City of Laguna BeachJohn Pietig, City Manager | July 23, 2019 |
| A4 | County of El Dorado Board of SupervisorsSue Novasel, Chair | July 23, 2019 |
| A5 | County of Fresno, Department of Public HealthDavid Pomaville, Director of Public Health and Assistant Emergency Services Director | July 26, 2019 |
| A6 | Butte County Federal/State Land-Use Coordinating CommitteeDennis Schmidt, Director of Public Works | August 2, 2019 |
| A7 | University of California, Santa Clara County Cooperative ExtensionSheila Barry, Bay Area Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor | August 2, 2019 |
| A8 | Stanislaus County Environmental Review CommitteePatrick Cavanah, Sr. Management Consultant | August 5, 2019 |
| A9 | County of San Mateo Board of SupervisorsCarole Groom, President | August 6, 2019 |
| A10 | County of Tuolumne Board of SupervisorsKarl Rodefer, Chairman | August 6, 2019 |
| A11 | Tuolumne Utilities DistrictEdwin R. Pattison, General Manager | August 6, 2019 |
| A12 | Sweetwater AuthorityRon R. Mosher, Director of Engineering | August 6, 2019 |
| A13 | County of Santa Barbara Executive OfficeDennis Bozanich, Deputy Executive Officer | August 7, 2019 |
| A14 | California Department of Transportation, Division of Transportation PlanningChristian Bushong, LD-IGR Branch Chief | August 7, 2019 |
| A15 | Santa Clara Valley Open Space AuthorityJennifer Hooper, Planning Technician | August 7, 2019 |
| A16 | Los Angeles Department of Water and PowerBrian Gonzalez, Environmental Planning and Assessment | August 8, 2019 |
| A17 | State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control BoardsKaren L. Mogus, Deputy Director, Division of Water Quality | August 8, 2019 |
| A18 | Mountains Recreation & Conservation AuthorityPaul Edelman, Chief of Natural Resources and Planning | August 8, 2019 |
| A19 | Ventura County Department of Public Works, Watershed ProtectionSergio Vargas, Deputy Director | August 8, 2019 |
| A20 | Placer County Air Pollution Control DistrictAnn Hobbs, Associate Planner | August 9, 2019 |
| A21 | University of California, Santa CruzTraci Ferdolage, Associate Vice Chancellor | August 9, 2019 |
| A22 | County of San Diego, Planning & Development ServicesEric Lardy, AICP, Chief, Advance Planning Division | August 9, 2019 |
| A23 | California Department of Fish and WildlifeChad Dibble, Deputy Director, Ecosystem Conservation Division | August 9, 2019 |
| A24 | California Coastal CommissionMadeline Cavalieri, Statewide Planning Manager | August 9, 2019 |
| A25 | County of Sonoma, Office of the County AdministratorMichael Gossman, Deputy County Administrator – Office of Recovery and Resiliency | August 9, 2019 |
| A26 | Los Angeles Department of Water and PowerBrian Gonzalez, Environmental Planning and Assessment | August 9, 2019 |
| A27 | University of California, BerkeleySally McGarrahan, Associate Vice Chancellor – Facilities | August 9, 2019 |
| A28 | California Department of Parks and RecreationJay Chamberlin, Chief, Natural Resources Division | August 9, 2019 |
| A29 | Midpeninsula Regional Open Space DistrictCoty Sifuentes‐Winter, Senior Resource Management Specialist | August 9, 2019 |
| A30 | University of California, MercedPhillip Woods, Director of Physical and Environmental Planning | August 9, 2019 |
|  | ELECTED OFFICIALS |  |
| E1 | Assembly California LegislatureJim Patterson, Assemblymember 23rd District | July 22, 2019 |
| E2 | California State SenateBill Dodd, Senator 3rd District | August 5, 2019 |
| E3 | Assembly California LegislatureLaura Friedman, Assemblymember 43rd District | August 1, 2019 |
| E4 | Assembly California LegislatureJim Wood, Assemblymember 2nd District | August 1, 2019 |
| E5 | California State SenateBrian Dahle, Senator 1st District | August 1, 2019 |
| E6 | Assembly California LegislatureMarc Levine, Assemblymember 10th District | August 5, 2019 |
| E7 | Assembly California LegislatureRandy Voepel, Assemblymember 71st District | August 12, 2019 |
| E8 | California LegislatureAndreas Borgeas, Senator 8th District and Frank Bigelow, Assemblymember 5th District | August 12, 2019 |
| E9 | Assembly California LegislatureJames Gallagher, Assemblymember 3rd District | August 8, 2019 |
| E10 | California State SenateJim Nielsen, Senator 4th District | August 8, 2019 |
| E11 | California State SenateMike Morrell, Senator 23rd District | August 8, 2019 |
| E11 | California State SenateHannah-Beth Jackson, Senator 19th District | August 9, 2019 |
| E12 | Assembly California LegislatureCecilia Aguiar-Curry, Assemblymember 4th District | August 9, 2019 |
|  | ORGANIZATIONS |  |
| O1 | Highway 168 Fire Safe CouncilHoward Hendrix, President | July 19, 2019 |
| O2 | Southern California EdisonRyan Stewart, Senior Supervisor, SCE Forestry | July 22, 2019 |
| O3 | Rural County Representatives of CaliforniaStaci Heaton, Senior Regulatory Affairs Advocate | July 25, 2019 |
| O4 | Central Sierra Environmental Resource CenterJohn Buckley, Executive Director | July 30, 2019 |
| O5 | American ForestsBrittany Dyer, CA State Director | August 4, 2019 |
| O6 | California Licensed Foresters AssociationChristopher Dow, President | August 5, 2019 |
| O7 | Big Sur Land TrustJeannette Tuitele-Lewis, President/CEO | August 6, 2019 |
| O8 | California Wildlife FoundationJanet Cobb, Executive Officer and Angela Moskow, Manager, California Oaks Coalition | August 7, 2019 |
| O9 | Sonoma Land TrustAnthony Nelson, Sonoma Valley Program Manager | August 7, 2019 |
| O10 | California Wool GrowersDan Macon, President | August 8, 2019 |
| O11 | California Women in Timber, State BoardSophia Lemmo, Legislative Chair | August 8, 2019 |
| O12 | Malibu Coalition for Slow GrowthPatt Healy | August 8, 2019 |
| O13 | Associated California LoggersEric Carleson, Executive Director | August 8, 2019 |
| O14 | Forest Landowners of CaliforniaClaire McAdams, President | August 8, 2019 |
| O15 | California Forestry AssociationGeorge D. Gentry, Senior Vice President | August 8, 2019 |
| O16 | California Landscape Stewardship NetworkKevin Wright, Chair, Funding and Legislation Working Group of the CA Network andSharon Farrell, Network Facilitator, CA Network | August 8, 2019 |
| O17 | Endangered Habitats LeagueDan Silver, Executive Director | August 8, 2019 |
| O18 | California Native Grasslands AssociationAndrea Williams, President and Jim Hanson, Conservation Chair | August 9, 2019 |
| O19 | Greenspace, The Cambria Land TrustAndrea Wogsland, Executive Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O20 | The Nature ConservancyJay Ziegler, Director of External Affairs and Policy | August 9, 2019 |
| O21 | Malibu Monarch ProjectGeorgia Goldfarb, Patt Healy, Judy Villablanca, and Sandy Glover | August 9, 2019 |
| O22 | Willits Environmental CenterEllen Drell  | August 9, 2019 |
| O23 | California Native Plant SocietyGreg Suba, Conservation Program Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O24 | Clover Valley FoundationMarilyn Jasper, Board of Directors | August 9, 2019 |
| O25 | Salo Sciences, Inc.David C. Marvin, Ph.D., President/CEO and Christopher B. Anderson, Vice-president/CTO | August 9, 2019 |
| O26 | Pacific Forest Trust, Paul Mason, Vice President, Policy and Incentives;Defenders of Wildlife, Kim Delfino, California Director;Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, John Buckley, Executive Director;Sierra Forest Legacy, Susan Britting, Ph.D., Executive Director;Sierra Business Council, Steven Frisch, President;California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, Karen Buhr, Executive Director;Fire Restoration Group, Craig Thomas, Director;California Wilderness Coalition, Chris Morrill, Executive Director;California Native Plant Society, Greg Suba, Conservation Director; andTrust for Public Land, Rico Mastrodonato, Government Affairs Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O27 | Safe Alternatives for our Forest Environment and Northcoast Environmental CenterLarry Glass, Executive Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O28 | San Diego Chapter of the California Native Plant Society and San Diego Audubon SocietyFrank Landis, Ph.D., Conservation Chair and James A. Peugh, Conservation Chair | August 9, 2019 |
| O29 | Environmental Defense FundEric Holst, Associate Vice President, Working Lands | August 9, 2019 |
| O30 | Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP, Laurel L. Impett, AICP, Urban Planner;Endangered Habitats League, Dan Silver, Executive Director;Center for Biological Diversity, Brian Nowicki, California Climate Policy Director; Shaye Wolf, Ph.D., Climate Science Director; and Lauren Packard, Staff Attorney;Sierra Club California, Daniel Barad, Campaigner;California Chaparral Institute, Richard W. Halsey, Director;Los Padres Forest Watch, Bryant Baker, Conservation Director;California Environmental Health Initiative, Nan Wishner, Founding Board Member;Center for Environmental Health, Caroline Cox, Senior Scientist; andPesticide Action Network North America, Emily Marquez, Ph.D., Staff Scientist | August 9, 2019 |
| O31 | California Farm Bureau Federation, Robert Spiegel, Government Affairs Advocate – Forestry and Natural Resources;California Cattlemen’s Association, Justin Oldfield, Vice President, Government Affairs; andCalifornia Wool Growers Association, Erica Sanko, Executive Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O32 | California Fire Safe CouncilTracy Katelman, Executive Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O33 | California Chaparral Institute, Richard W. Halsey, Director;Los Padres ForestWatch, Bryant Baker, Conservation Director; andSequoia ForestKeeper, Ara Marderosian, Executive Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O34 | California Professional FirefightersBrian K. Rice, President | August 9, 2019 |
| O35 | The Fire Restoration GroupCraig Thomas, Director | August 9, 2019 |
| O36 | California Native Plant Society, Los Angeles/Santa Monica Mountains ChapterBetsey Landis, Conservation Committee | August 9, 2019 |
| O37 | American Forest FoundationRita Hite, Executive Vice-President | August 9, 2019 |
|  | INDIVIDUALS |  |
| I1 | David Jinkens, MPA | July 25, 2019 |
| I2 | Shannon Wooten | July 29, 2019 |
| I3 | Anne S. Fege, Ph.D. | August 6, 2019 |
| I4 | Peter Gruchawka | August 6, 2019 |
| I5 | Beth Robinson Bosk | August 8, 2019 |
| I6 | Lori L. Paul and Robert Staehle | August 8, 2019 |
| I7 | Nancy Summers | August 8, 2019 |
| I8 | Peter H. StClair | August 9, 2019 |
| I9 | Chuck Williams | August 9, 2019 |
|  | LETTERS RECEIVED AFTER THE CLOSE OF THE DRAFT PEIR PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD |  |
|  | California State SenateCathleen Galgiani, Senator 5th District | August 12, 2019 |
|  | Sea and Sage Audubon SocietySusan Sheakley, Conservation Chair | August 13, 2019 |
|  | Endangered Habitats LeagueDan Silver, Executive Director | August 28, 2019 |
|  | County of Los Angeles Fire DepartmentMichael Y. Takeshita, Acting Chief, Forestry Division  | September 11, 2019 |

## Master Responses

Several comments raised similar issues. Rather than responding individually, master responses are presented to address the comments comprehensively. Master responses are provided for the following topics:

* Master Response 1: Effectiveness of the CalVTP in Reducing Wildfire Risk
* Master Response 2: Vegetation Treatment Maintenance
* Master Response 3: Vegetation Treatments in Chaparral and Coastal Sage Scrub
* Master Response 4: Vegetation Treatment Project Development, Review, and Decision-Making Process
* Master Response 5: Public Notification for Vegetation Treatment Projects
* Master Response 6: Public Availability of Information on Vegetation Treatment Projects
* Master Response 7: Agency Coordination
* Master Response 8: Monitoring and Adaptive Management
* Master Response 9: Herbicide Use Effects on Public Health, Biological Resources, and Water Quality

References to master responses are identified, where relevant, in responses to individual comments.

### Master Response 1: Effectiveness of the CalVTP in Reducing Wildfire Risk

Commenters questioned the need for the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP), disputing the assertion that the state is facing a wildfire crisis and stating that historic wildfire data presented in the PEIR are inaccurate. Comments state that large wildfires have historically accounted for less than 2 percent of all wildfires within the state and that the CalVTP would not reduce risks from these larger wind-driven fires. Comments contend that current wildfire science demonstrates the ineffectiveness of vegetation treatments in reducing wildfire risk and that the CalVTP should focus on community hardening, defensible space, treatments within the wildland-urban interface (WUI), and improving emergency access.

#### Wildfire in California

The historic record of California wildfires was comprehensively reviewed during preparation of the PEIR and is summarized in Section 1.1, “Purpose of the CalVTP,” and Table 3.17-1 (Section 3.17, “Wildfire”) in Volume II of this Final PEIR. As described in Section 1.1, according to fire data dating back to 1932, 15 of the state’s 20 largest wildfires have occurred since 2002 (CAL FIRE 2019). As described under “Climate Change and Wildfire” in Section 3.17.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the total annual burned acreage in California is highly variable, from fewer than 150,000 acres in 2010 to more than 1.6 million acres in 2018 (CAL FIRE 2018a, 2018b).

Historically, California’s wildfires were less severe, burning fewer acres and destroying fewer structures by factors of two and three, respectively, when compared with modern fire statistics (CAL FIRE 2018a). As discussed in Section 1.1, “Purpose of the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, in addition to recent trends of wildfires becoming more severe in California, the increase in the total number and acreage of wildfires is also important to recognize. Since 2010, the number of wildfires occurring annually has been increasing, as has the number of acres burned. Much of this increase in acreage, especially in 2017 and 2018, is the result of record-setting wildfires primarily driven by wind, such as the Thomas and Northern California wildfires (2017) and the Camp and the Mendocino Complex fires (2018). In addition to these iconic, tragic fires, there have been thousands of smaller fires in recent years that are not highly wind driven. In addition, since 2000, the fire season has started sooner and extended further into the winter months. The fire sieges in October and December 2017 serve as prime examples of the expanding fire season (CAL FIRE 2018b).

#### Effectiveness of Vegetation Treatments

As explained in Section 1.1, “Purpose of the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, vegetation treatment at the landscape scale as proposed under the CalVTP is focused on reducing the likelihood of a ground fire increasing in intensity and on helping fire responders more easily contain a wildfire. Certain wind and weather conditions lead to high-intensity, fast-moving, wind-driven wildfires. Although the most individually destructive, these extreme fires represent a small number of the total fires that occur each year. When high-wind conditions drive a large fire, such as when large embers travel long distances in advance of the fire, vegetation treatment would do little, if anything, to stop downwind advance of the fire front. However, once winds slow, vegetation treatments proposed under the CalVTP can play a valuable role in achieving containment of the more extreme fires by providing firefighters increased visibility and safer access to the fire, reducing heat and smoke, and allowing for quicker suppression of spot fires. Although vegetation treatments under the CalVTP may not be able to slow or halt the forward advance of these extreme wind-driven wildfires during periods of high-wind conditions, the large majority of wildfires that occur within the state are not highly wind driven, and the proposed vegetation treatments can slow and help suppress them by reducing the risk that ground burns will climb to crown fires in forests, providing improved access to fire in fuel breaks, and slowing fire movement by reducing levels of fuel. Although vegetation treatments alone may not reduce wildfire risks for all large wind-driven fires, it does not diminish the need to reduce overall wildfire risk and to prevent and suppress fires within the State Responsibility Area (SRA).

As discussed under “Vegetation (Fuel) Management” in Section 3.17.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, vegetation treatment is the primary approach to wildfire management because it can reduce the intensity and severity of wildfire, slowing fire movement and creating favorable conditions for firefighting to protect targeted, high-value resources (Carey and Schumann 2003; Prichard et al. 2010). Fuel reduction has proven successful where it is targeted at protecting specific resources in limited geographic areas, such as in areas of extreme fire danger or in the WUI (Loudermilk et al. 2014). Areas that are treated often exhibit different fire progression characteristics and reduced fire severity compared to areas that are not treated (Lydersen et al. 2017; Johnson and Kennedy 2019). Reducing fuels through mechanical treatments and prescribed fire has been found to be effective at reducing fire frequency, fire severity, and annual area burned when applied at the landscape scale over an extended period (Kim et al. 2013; Martinson and Omi 2013; Prichard and Kennedy 2014; Tubbesing et al. 2019). These effects have also been found to be most effective during extreme weather conditions (i.e., hotter and drier). At these times, there is also a higher likelihood that fires will intersect with treated areas, which contributes to higher effectiveness of those treatments at reducing wildfire behavior and effects (Cassell 2018). Another study found simulated fuel treatments in the Lake Tahoe Basin returned the forest to more historic and fire-resilient conditions, reduced wildfire risk and severity, controlled wildfire carbon emissions, and in the long run, resulted in a net carbon gain (Loudermilk et al. 2014). In another study, mechanical treatments followed by prescribed burning produced the strongest results, with more resilient forest structures, lower surface fuel loads, and a reduced rate of accumulation of surface fuels (Schwilk et al. 2009).

It has also been found that fuel treatments are most effective when wildfires are driven by typical weather situations where prevailing seasonal conditions of temperature, soil/fuel, and moisture contents are present. In circumstances where extreme weather conditions exist, such as in cases of extremely low humidity and very high winds, fuel treatments are less effective (Brown et al. 2008), particularly when persistently high winds can blow hot embers over long distances. While evidence has not definitively concluded that forest fuel treatments lead to a reduction in the overall size of a fire (USFS 2009; Schoennagel et al. 2017), such treatments can aid in protecting public safety and homes and other structures by reducing wildfire intensity and severity in treated areas under normal fire conditions and by increasing firefighting effectiveness (Kalies and Yocom Kent 2016). Where treatments have occurred, the pattern of wildfire progression may be limited in some areas to low-intensity underbrush and surface burning, which can create safer conditions for firefighters to successfully suppress fires in areas near homes or other structures, or around areas of high resource value. Fuel treatments also promote faster postfire forest recovery by causing less damage to soils and leaving some live vegetation within burn areas (USFS 2009), increasing seedling regeneration (Tubbesing et al. 2019), protecting resources such as soils, wildlife, riparian function, and wetlands (Kim et al. 2013), and reducing drought-related tree mortality (Restaino et al. 2019).

The Board acknowledges that the state of wildfire science is continuing to evolve. This is reflected under “Wildfire Risk Reduction” in Section 3.17.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, which states that there are important data gaps in documenting fuel treatment effectiveness. In part, this is because the uncertainty of wildfire timing and location does not lend itself to a controlled experimental setting within which researchers could predict and measure prefire and postfire conditions, and the available datasets and records of past fire and fuel treatments are not complete and comprehensive (Syphard et al. 2011; Barnett et al. 2016). Although more research to document certain aspects of fuel treatment effectiveness in the scientific literature is needed and ongoing as wildfires continue to increase in frequency, size, severity, and duration, as discussed above and in Section 3.17, “Wildfire,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, there is strong correlation between certain fuel treatments and reduced wildfire risk. Despite the data gaps and acknowledgment that more research is needed to better understand studies within conflicting conclusions, studies cited in Volume II of this Final PEIR support the conclusion that vegetation treatments reduce wildfire risk in the large majority of fire conditions. Section 15151 of the State CEQA Guidelines states that disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

Comment O30-6 questions the efficacy of vegetation treatments in reducing wildfire risk, with specific reference to certain studies cited in the PEIR. A comprehensive response is provided to that comment in this master response because it broadly addresses the effectiveness of vegetation treatments and is useful in responding to other specific comments. Several citations to case studies discussed by commenters omit conclusions that support the use of vegetation treatments to reduce wildfire risk, such as the following excerpt from Carey and Schumann (2003), cited in comment O30-6:

Although the assertion is frequently made that reducing tree density can reduce wildfire hazard, the scientific literature provides tenuous support for this hypothesis. This review indicates that the specifics of how prescriptions are to be carried out and the effectiveness of these treatments in changing wildfire behavior are not supported by a significant consensus of scientific research at this point in time.

The cited text omits the following key finding from Carey and Schumann (2003), which supports a correlation between vegetation treatments and modifying wildfire behavior:

The literature leaves little doubt, however, that fuel treatments can modify fire behavior. Thus, factors other than tree density, such as the distance from the ground to the base of the tree crown, surface vegetation and dead materials play a key role. Research has not yet fully developed the relationship among these factors in changing fire behavior.

Comment O30-6 states that Kalies and Yocom Kent (2016) do not support the conclusion that vegetation treatments lead to increased public safety or firefighting effectiveness as cited in Volume II of this Final PEIR. While Kalies and Yocom Kent (2016) acknowledge that additional peer-reviewed studies are needed and that evidence has not definitively concluded that forest fuel treatments lead to a reduction in the overall size of a fire, Kalies and Yocom Kent (2016) state that such treatments can aid in protecting public safety and homes and other structures by reducing wildfire intensity and severity in treated areas under normal fire conditions and by increasing firefighting effectiveness. Furthermore, six studies (one peer reviewed and five anecdotal) reviewed for this analysis all reported that firefighting effectiveness was increased in treated areas because of increased visibility, reduced heat and smoke, safe access to the fire, and quick suppression of spot fires.

Comment O30-6 further states that Prichard et al. (2010) does not support the conclusion that treatments slowed fire movement or created favorable conditions for firefighting as cited in Volume II of this Final PEIR. Prichard et al. (2010) states:

Vegetation treatment is the primary approach to wildfire management, because it can reduce the intensity and severity of wildfire, slowing fire movement and creating favorable conditions for firefighting to protect targeted, high-value resources.

While the effectiveness of any vegetation management treatment in controlling wildfire depends on numerous site-specific characteristics, some evidence indicates that a combination of mechanical treatments followed by prescribed burning can be more effective at reducing fire severity and extent in certain locations than treatments that do not include prescribed burning.

Fire spread did appear to be influenced by previous wildfires and fuel treatments. The most striking example of this was the approximately 1000 ha 1974 Forks fire located in the center of the Tripod perimeter. The Tripod Complex fires originated to the south and north of the old fire and wrapped around either side of the young lodgepole pine forest, burning only the edges of the regenerating trees. Similarly, a network of fuel treatments is located along the southwestern fire perimeter and was used as defensible space for back-burning to prevent fire spread toward nearby communities.

Increasing evidence shows that mechanical thinning followed by surface fuel removal is the most effective management approach to mitigate wildfire severity in dry forests…strategic placement of these fuel treatments may also be effective at limiting fire spread across critical landscapes.

This supports the conclusion that vegetation treatment is an effective approach to wildfire risk reduction because it can reduce the intensity and severity of wildfire, slowing fire movement, and creating favorable conditions for firefighting to protect targeted, high-value resources as stated under “Vegetation (Fuel) Management” in Section 3.17.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

Other studies cited by commenters as scientific evidence that thinning in forests results in higher wildfire severity and lower drought resistance, such as D’Amato et al. (2013), Zald and Dunn (2018), and Bradley et al. (2016), evaluate the effects of logging and silviculture treatments on wildfire and drought resistance. As described in Section 2.5.4, “Treatment Activities Excluded from the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, removal of trees for commercial purposes (timber harvesting) is not proposed under the CalVTP.

#### NonVegetation Treatments

As stated in Section 1.1, “Purpose of the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the Board acknowledges that vegetation treatments alone will not solve the wildfire crisis. The proposed CalVTP is one element of the comprehensive response by federal, state, and local agencies, as well as community organizations and private citizens, to address wildfire risk statewide, and it would serve as the primary vegetation management component of the range of actions underway throughout the state to reduce risks to life, property, and natural resources. The state’s approach to the crisis includes an array of strategies, such as cost-effective home hardening, expanded evacuation capacity, comprehensive emergency planning, and improved land use practices, as well as investment in new suppression and response equipment and resources, use of technology tools, and establishment of strong utility oversight. Although an important part of the state’s approach, the increase in the pace and scale of vegetation treatment to reduce wildfire risk, as proposed under the CalVTP, is not a singular solution to the complex problem of resolving wildfire hazards.

As further discussed under “Other Fire Prevention Programs” in Section 1.4.1, “Existing CAL FIRE Programs,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, Assembly Bill 2911 requires the Office of the State Fire Marshal, no later than January 31, 2020, to recommend updated building standards that provide for comprehensive site and structure fire risk reduction to protect structures from fires spreading, as specified, based on lessons learned from the wildfires of 2017, and to develop a list of low-cost retrofits that provide for comprehensive site and structure fire risk reduction. In addition, the “Public Resources Code Section 4291—Defensible Space” section in Section 1.4.1, “Existing CAL FIRE Programs,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, states that the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s (CAL FIRE’s) fire prevention activities include providing education about and enforcement of Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 4291, which addresses defensible space. PRC Section 4291 directs the creation and maintenance of 100 feet of defensible space around all buildings and structures on forest-, brush-, and grass-covered lands or any land that is covered with flammable material. The law also allows insurance companies and local ordinances, rules, and regulations to require homeowners to maintain defensible space greater than 100 feet.

The Board acknowledges and supports the importance of these other nonvegetation treatment–related wildfire risk reduction programs and efforts that are also underway by the Board, CAL FIRE, and other agencies to provide a comprehensive approach to reducing wildfire risk. The Draft PEIR does not contend that vegetation treatments alone should be the response to wildfire risk reduction, nor does it state that vegetation treatments alone are the most effective treatment for wildfire risk reduction in all circumstances, as asserted by several commenters. Nonetheless, research studies and field experience have shown that vegetation treatment is an important and effective component of a multifaceted response to California’s wildfire crisis, which is why the Board has proposed adoption of the CalVTP.

### Master Response 2: Vegetation Treatment Maintenance

Commenters raised questions about whether and how maintenance of treated areas is considered in the Draft PEIR and will be addressed in the Project-Specific Analysis (PSA) for proposed later vegetation treatment projects. Refer to Master Response 8 regarding treatment monitoring.

The maintenance component of the proposed CalVTP is described under “Treatment Maintenance” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. The suite of treatment activities that can be used to maintain treatments is the same suite of treatment activities that can be used to implement the initial treatment. The impact analysis in Chapter 3 of the Draft PEIR presents comprehensive analyses of the impacts of these treatment activities and treatment types. Therefore, the environmental consequences of treatment activities implemented for maintenance of already treated sites have been addressed in the Draft PEIR.

Maintenance treatment activities change over time to reflect the evolving character of vegetation communities. Often the maintenance treatment is different from the original treatment. For instance, an original prescribed burn treatment may be followed by herbicide application(s) to control shrub regrowth, or an original manual treatment using chainsaws to create shaded fuel breaks along public roads may be followed by periodic prescribed burning to keep sprouting and fuel loads low. Nonetheless, all of the potential treatment activities that may occur for maintenance purposes have been evaluated in the Draft PEIR.

The description of the later treatment project in the PSA must address the “whole action involved, including but not limited to later phases (e.g., maintenance)” (refer to page 12, question #6b in Appendix PD-3 of Final PEIR Volume II). In nearly all cases, follow-up or maintenance treatments are needed to achieve a desired treatment type; however, the maintenance interval varies according to vegetation types and site conditions. The PSA is designed to cover maintenance by requiring project proponents to describe the time frame to complete the initial treatment and anticipated maintenance activities with expected maintenance intervals, including the vegetation conditions that would trigger the need for maintenance. To the extent predictable, the PSA will also describe the site conditions that are reasonably expected to be present in the future in response to the original treatments. The environmental analysis of the project in the PSA will consider the whole action, including expected maintenance, identifying the relevant Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) and mitigation measures that could be applied to either the initial or the follow-up treatments.

The objectives of different treatment types also influence maintenance interval. For example, maintenance activities to maintain a nonshaded fuel break in a forested area would be relatively frequent, because of the need to minimize understory fuels, compared to an ecological restoration treatment in chaparral, which would be designed without near-term maintenance, so the native plant community could establish or reestablish the treated area. Therefore, similar to CEQA environmental documents in general, a PSA would not have a specific time limit of validity (also called “shelf life”). The PSA provides guidance for verifying the continued relevance of the PSA in light of potentially changed conditions or circumstances to provide CEQA coverage for treatment maintenance (refer to “Use of the PSA for Treatment Maintenance” in Appendix PD-3 of Volume II of this Final PEIR).

### Master Response 3: Vegetation Treatments in Chaparral and Coastal Sage Scrub

Commenters raised concerns that the treatable landscape includes areas of chaparral and coastal sage scrub habitats that have experienced fire too frequently and are becoming increasingly rare; comments stated that no treatments should occur in these areas. Commenters also stated that the measures in the CalVTP PEIR would not ensure compliance with PRC Section 4483 (Senate Bill [SB] 1260, Statutes of 2018), which, among other provisions, prohibits type conversion of chaparral and coastal sage scrub.

As discussed in Section 2.4, “Geographic Scope of the CalVTP – Treatable Landscape,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, 20.3 million acres within the 31-million-acre SRA were identified that may be appropriate for vegetation treatments under the proposed CalVTP. The boundaries of the treatable landscape delineate the area where treatments *could* be implemented; however, determining whether a specific site is suitable for treatment and the type of treatment that is suitable will be evaluated through completion of a PSA prior to implementation of any treatment. Completion of the PSA also requires the project proponent to determine that all applicable SPRs and mitigation measures identified in the CalVTP PEIR have been incorporated into the project. See Master Response 4 for additional information on the project development and PSA completion processes. In this way, proposed treatments in chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation communities would be tailored in consideration of the site-specific vegetation conditions and environmental resources, as well as the objectives of the proposed treatment type.

For example, and as discussed under Impact BIO-1, the objective of the ecological restoration treatment type is to restore degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems and habitats in fire-adapted vegetation types by returning them to their natural fire regime and returning vegetation in Condition Classes 2 and 3 to Condition Class 1. Accordingly, Mitigation Measure BIO-3a calls for the use of prescribed burning as the primary treatment activity in sensitive natural communities that are fire dependent (e.g., closed-cone forest and woodland alliances, chaparral alliances characterized by fire-stimulated, obligate seeders) to the extent feasible and appropriate based on the fire regime attributes as described in *Fire in California’s Ecosystems* (Van Wagtendonk et al. 2018) and the *Manual of California Vegetation* (Sawyer et al. 2009). The purpose of aligning prescribed burning with scientific information in reference resources is to eliminate or substantially reduce the risks of degrading habitat function.

The discussion under Impact BIO-3 (regarding chaparral and coastal sage scrub) acknowledges that shortened fire return intervals have been identified as a primary driver of type conversion from chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation types to vegetation types dominated by nonnative herbaceous vegetation in southern California (Syphard et al. 2019; Cox et al. 2014; Talluto and Suding 2008; Underwood et al. 2018). Even though chaparral vegetation is fire adapted, and some chaparral species are even fire dependent (e.g., have seeds that are stimulated to germinate by fire), most chaparral types require a minimum of 10 years to recover from fire and chaparral types dominated by obligate seeder shrubs that are fire stimulated and generally require a minimum of 15 years to accumulate enough seed in the soil seedbank to recover (Syphard et al. 2019). Chaparral vegetation types that are characterized by facultative seeders (i.e., regenerate by resprouting and from seed) are more resilient to fire than those characterized primarily by obligate seeders, but these, too, can be degraded by repeated short-interval fires. Therefore, vegetation treatment projects implemented under the CalVTP, including prescribed burning, could potentially result in type conversion of chaparral vegetation if the treatment does not replicate the natural fire regime of the vegetation type present. Implementation of SPR BIO-5 would avoid environmental effects of type conversion of chaparral and coastal sage scrub by designing treatment projects to replicate the natural fire regime, return the vegetation type to its natural condition class, and maintain or improve the natural habitat function of those alliances. Environmental effects of type conversion considered in the Draft PEIR relate to whether a substantial reduction in the function of affected habitats would occur.

Pursuant to SPR BIO-5, the project proponent will design treatment projects to avoid type conversion where native coastal sage scrub and chaparral are present. Because a legislative or regulatory definition of “type conversion” has not yet been formulated, an ecological definition of “type conversion” has been developed to guide the CalVTP PEIR environmental analysis: a change from a vegetation type dominated by native shrub species that are characteristic of chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation alliances to a vegetation type characterized predominantly by weedy herbaceous cover or annual grasslands. While this definition is suitable for environmental analysis, it does not have application outside of the PEIR. For the PEIR, type conversion is considered in terms of habitat function, which is defined here as the arrangement and capability of habitat features to provide refuge, food source, and reproduction habitat to plants and animals, and thereby contribute to the conservation of biological and genetic diversity and evolutionary processes (de Groot et al. 2002). Some modification of habitat characteristics may occur without type conversion, provided habitat function is maintained (i.e., the location, essential habitat features, and species supported are not substantially changed).

The PEIR definition is used in the analysis of the following impacts, which address resources pursuant to CEQA (State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G and Section 15380):

* Impact BIO-2: Substantially Affect Special-Status Wildlife Species Either Directly or Through Habitat Modifications
* Impact BIO-3: Substantially Affect Riparian Habitat or Other Sensitive Natural Community Through Direct Loss or Degradation That Leads to Loss of Habitat Function
* Impact BIO-5: Interfere Substantially with Wildlife Movement Corridors or Impede Use of Nurseries
* Impact BIO-6: Substantially Reduce Habitat or Abundance of Common Wildlife, Including Nesting Birds

The “terminal condition” of type conversion (i.e., a vegetation type characterized predominantly by weedy herbaceous cover or annual grasslands) is not used as a significance threshold, because the type conversion prohibition is not a part of the CEQA statute. Rather, impact determinations consider whether there is a substantial reduction in the value or function of affected habitats, which considers the loss of biodiversity.

Provisions of SPR BIO-5 that would be implemented to avoid environmental effects of type conversion (i.e., a substantial reduction in the value or function of affected habitats) and maintain habitat values and functions in chaparral and coastal sage scrub are excerpted below:

During the reconnaissance-level survey required in SPR BIO-1, a qualified RPF or biologist will identify chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation to the alliance level and determine the condition class and fire return interval departure of the chaparral and/or coastal sage scrub present in each treatment area.

For all treatment types in chaparral and coastal sage scrub, the project proponent, in consultation with a qualified RPF or qualified biologist will:

* Develop a treatment design that avoids environmental effects of type conversion in chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation alliances, which will include evaluating and determining the appropriate spatial scale at which the proponent would consider type conversion, and substantiating its appropriateness. The project proponent will demonstrate with substantial evidence that the habitat function of chaparral and coastal sage scrub would be at least maintained within the identified spatial scale at which type conversion is evaluated for the specific treatment project.
* The treatment design will maintain a minimum percent cover of mature native shrubs within the treatment area to maintain habitat function; the appropriate percent cover will be identified by the project proponent in the development of treatment design and be specific to the vegetation alliances that are present in the identified spatial scale used to evaluate type conversion. Mature native shrubs that are retained will be distributed contiguously or in patches within the stand. If the stand consists of multiple age classes, patches representing a range of middle to old age classes will be retained to maintain and improve heterogeneity, to the extent needed to avoid type conversion.

These SPR requirements apply to all treatment activities and all treatment types, including treatment maintenance.

Additional measures will be applied to ecological restoration treatment types:

* For ecological restoration treatment types, complete removal of the mature shrub layer will not occur in native chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation types.
* Ecological restoration treatments will not be implemented in vegetation types that are within their natural fire return interval (i.e., time since last burn is less than the average time listed as the fire return interval range in Table 3.6-1) unless the project proponent demonstrates with substantial evidence that the habitat function of chaparral and coastal sage scrub would be improved.
* A minimum of 35 percent relative cover of existing shrubs and associated native vegetation will be retained at existing densities in patches distributed in a mosaic pattern within the treated area or the shrub canopy will be thinned by no more than 20 percent from baseline density (i.e., if baseline shrub canopy density is 60 percent, post treatment shrub canopy density will be no less than 40 percent). A different percent relative cover can be retained if the project proponent demonstrates with substantial evidence that alternative treatment design measures would result in effects on the habitat function of chaparral and coastal sage scrub that are equal or more favorable than those expected to result from application of the above measures.
* If the stand within the treatment area consists of multiple age classes, patches representing a range of middle to old age classes will be retained to maintain and improve heterogeneity.

These SPR requirements apply to all treatment activities and only the ecosystem restoration treatment type, including treatment maintenance.

#### Applicability of PRC Section 4483 (SB 1260) to the Proposed CalVTP

Commenters requested clarification about the relationship between SB 1260, Statutes of 2018, and the Draft PEIR analysis as they relate to the statute’s prohibition of “type conversion” when conducting certain vegetation treatments in chaparral and coastal sage scrub. SB 1260 created a new PRC Section 4483, which states:

(a) To the extent feasible, the board’s Vegetation Treatment Program Programmatic Environmental Impact Report, when certified, shall serve, in addition to any identified entities in the report, as the programmatic environmental document for prescribed fires initiated by a third party for a public purpose pursuant to Section 4491.

(b) (1) It is the intent of the Legislature that additional consideration be provided for chaparral and coastal sage scrub plant communities that are being increasingly threatened by fire frequency in excess of their natural fire return patterns due to climate change and human-caused fires.

(2) Prescribed burning, mastication, herbicide application, mechanical thinning, or other vegetative treatments of chaparral or sage scrub shall occur only if the department finds that the activity will not cause “type conversion” away from the chaparral and coastal sage scrub currently on site.

A determination of compliance with the SB 1260 prohibition of type conversion in chaparral and coastal sage scrub is a statutory issue separate from CEQA compliance; SB 1260 and CEQA are in different chapters of the Public Resources Code. SB 1260 compliance criteria have not yet been defined, and they may involve factors additional to the ecological definition and habitat functions presented in the PEIR, such as geographic context. It is beyond the legal scope of the Draft PEIR to define type conversion for the purpose of SB 1260 or the criteria for statutory compliance with PRC Section 4483(b)(2).

The project proponent, acting as lead agency for the proposed later treatment project, will be responsible for compliance with the type conversion prohibition, as required by SB 1260. The project proponent may draw upon information presented in this Final PEIR when considering its approach to compliance with PRC Section 4483(b)(2), in the absence of any statutory or regulatory definition of “type conversion.” As explained above, the impact analysis in the CalVTP PEIR relies on an ecological definition of type conversion, and related CEQA significance conclusions consider whether there is a substantial reduction in the value or function of affected habitats, which is understood to be the general intent of PRC Section 4483(b)(2).

### Master Response 4: Vegetation Treatment Project Development, Review, and Decision-Making Process

Commenters requested information on and clarification of the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects seeking to use the CalVTP PEIR for CEQA compliance, including interagency coordination. The Board and CAL FIRE will provide training related to CalVTP implementation, including how to complete a PSA and how to provide information to CAL FIRE on proposed, approved and completed projects as required by SPR AD-7, as soon as possible after certification of the PEIR. This training will be available to project proponents, regulatory agencies, and other interested parties. The Board will contact those on the PEIR mailing list via email and post information online when the training is available.

To the extent public review or public availability of information is a component of these processes, it is identified in the description below. Refer to Master Response 5 for detailed information on the public notification and public review requirements for proposed vegetation treatment projects seeking to use this Final PEIR for CEQA compliance. Master Response 6 describes the public availability of information on proposed and approved vegetation treatment projects.

#### Vegetation Treatment Project Development

Project proponents may initiate the development of a vegetation treatment project through a variety of ways. As explained in Section 1.5.2, “Responsible and Trustee Agencies,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, a project proponent is a public agency providing funding for vegetation treatment or with land ownership, land management, or other regulatory responsibility in the treatable landscape and seeking to implement vegetation treatments consistent with this Final PEIR for CEQA compliance. As it pertains to the CalVTP, vegetation treatment projects may be directly undertaken by a public agency project proponent, including by CAL FIRE, on private or public lands. CAL FIRE identifies projects in its Unit/Contract County Fire Plans and Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). The development of CWPPs largely relies on the input of the public into CWPPs, which may be selected for a Unit Fire Plan; this is one mechanism for public involvement in treatment project development. Other project proponents that manage or own public land may identify projects to reduce wildfire risk or promote landscape resiliency as part of a land management plan or as needed in targeted areas and may solicit the input of the public during project development.

Vegetation treatment projects may be funded by CAL FIRE through the award of a grant to another public agency or to a nongovernmental organization, such as a Fire Safe Council. Awardees that are public agencies are project proponents required to comply with CEQA and may use the PEIR in their environmental review process. If the awardee is a nongovernmental organization, CAL FIRE, as the funding grantor, remains the project proponent. If there is no CAL FIRE or other grant of public funds and no public agency approval other than the issuance of a permit to carry out the vegetation treatment (e.g., lake and streambed alteration agreement from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW]), the permitting agency would become the project proponent and would need to comply with CEQA. This latter circumstance would be rare for projects implemented under the CalVTP.

#### Environmental Review (PSA Preparation) and Interagency Coordination

The initial step in CEQA compliance for vegetation treatment projects under the CalVTP is completion of the PSA, which is prepared by the project proponent. The PSA documents the determination of whether the proposed vegetation treatment project qualifies as within the scope of this Final PEIR, requires additional environmental documentation to add to the PEIR analysis, or requires its own independent environmental review process. Such evaluations will ascertain whether a later vegetation treatment project is consistent with the description of activities contained in the CalVTP and whether the effects on the environment were covered in the PEIR. Also, a project proponent will evaluate whether the later activity would (1) cause a new significant effect; (2) cause a significant effect addressed in the PEIR to become substantially more severe; or (3) require a mitigation measure or alternative substantially different from or previously found to be infeasible in the PEIR. If none of those outcomes are determined, and the effects on the environment were covered in the PEIR, the later activity can be found to be within the scope of this Final PEIR; in this situation, no additional environmental documentation would be required (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[c][1], [2], and [4]). The determination that a project is within the scope of the PEIR is a factual determination that must be supported by substantial evidence. The substantial evidence to support the finding is developed using the PSA checklist provided in Appendix PD-3 of Final PEIR Volume II.

Under this CEQA compliance approach, a project proponent must incorporate from the PEIR into the later activity all SPRs relevant to the proposed activity and all feasible mitigation measures in response to significant impacts caused by the later activity. Many of the SPRs and mitigation measures require coordination with agencies that have regulatory jurisdiction over or technical expertise regarding affected resources (e.g., CDFW). This interagency coordination process would occur during completion of the PSA and (as described below) during project implementation. Additionally, the PSA would document whether any permits from responsible agencies are required for the proposed project.

If a later vegetation treatment project would not qualify for a within-the- scope finding, then additional documentation may need to be prepared that accompanies the PEIR for the project’s CEQA compliance, or independent environmental review and documentation under CEQA may need to be conducted (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[c][1]). If additional documentation is needed, it may be a negative declaration (ND), mitigated negative declaration (MND), or an EIR, depending on the changed environmental impacts Refer to Section PD-3.2 in Appendix PD-3 of Final PEIR Volume II for additional instruction on evaluating environmental impacts of later vegetation treatment projects. The determination regarding whether a proposed project is within the scope of the CalVTP PEIR or whether additional environmental review is required can be made by an authorized agency representative of the project proponent; this determination is documented with the representative’s signature on the form found on page 14 of the PSA (Appendix PD-3 in Volume II of this Final PEIR). As stated in Section 2.6, “Implementation Framework,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the CAL FIRE Sacramento CEQA coordinator makes this determination for projects for which CAL FIRE is the project proponent.

If through completion of the PSA a project proponent determines that a proposed project is within the scope of the CalVTP PEIR, then the project proponent would act as a responsible agency pursuant to CEQA. Responsible agencies may use the CalVTP PEIR for CEQA compliance, including within-the-scope findings. If the PSA determines that a proposed project is not within the scope of the CalVTP PEIR, then the project proponent may serve as a lead agency in the preparation of additional environmental documentation that accompanies the PEIR for CEQA compliance or in the conduct of a separate, independent CEQA review and documentation process.

#### Decision-Making Process

The project proponent with discretionary approval authority will follow its agency-specific decision-making procedures when considering the CEQA review approach (i.e., determine the later activity is within the scope of the PEIR, adopt an ND or MND, or certify an EIR) and will determine whether to approve the proposed vegetation treatment project. Consideration of the CEQA process and project approval may not be included on the meeting agenda and noticed to the public, depending on the environmental regulations or policies of the project proponent. In all cases, the completed PSA and additional environmental documentation, if any, would be reviewed and considered by the agency before it renders its decision regarding whether to approve the proposed project.

In all cases where a CEQA document is prepared (whether a within-the-scope finding in the form of a completed PSA, an ND, an MND, or a supplemental or subsequent EIR), if a vegetation treatment project is approved, the project proponent shall file a notice of determination (NOD). If the lead agency is a state agency, the agency shall file the NOD with the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research (OPR) within 5 working days of project approval. If the lead agency is a local agency, the agency shall file the NOD with the county clerk within the county or counties in which the project will be located. If the project requires any discretionary approval by a state agency (e.g., a permit issued by CDFW), the local agency shall also file the notice with OPR. Whether posted at OPR or with a county clerk, the NOD will be available for public inspection for at least 30 days. The decision-making process will follow the standard procedure required by CEQA.

#### Implementation

After a vegetation treatment project is approved, the project proponent may execute the treatment project, which will include implementation of the SPRs and mitigation measures identified in the PSA or additional environmental documentation. As specified in the mitigation monitoring and reporting program (MMRP) completed for each project through the PSA or additional environmental documentation, applicable SPRs and mitigation measures must be implemented prior to, during, or after treatment projects. Verification of their implementation would typically be the responsibility of the project proponent or another entity to which the project proponent has delegated responsibility. Refer to Master Response 8 for additional information regarding monitoring. As mentioned above under “Environmental Review (PSA Preparation) and Interagency Coordination,” coordination with resource agencies is required by several SPRs and mitigation measures.

### Master Response 5: Public Notification for Vegetation Treatment Projects

Commenters requested public notice of proposed later treatment projects seeking to use this Final PEIR for CEQA compliance, including public review of the PSA and an opportunity to provide input on the later activity. The Board recognizes the public and agency interest in implementing the proposed CalVTP and the value of local resource information that interested parties have regarding site-specific projects. The Board will promote to project proponents the need for transparency and public awareness of later activities necessary for CalVTP implementation, and the usefulness of obtaining local resource information. Recognizing the critical goal of increasing the pace and scale of vegetation treatments on a statewide scale, the Board intends to employ CEQA streamlining consistent with the CalVTP when possible for later activities. In these cases, public notice, public awareness, and local input may rely on approaches not tied to CEQA compliance.

To provide transparency and obtain relevant local information, the Board is developing a publicly accessible online database. The database will provide information on proposed projects (i.e., projects for which a PSA is in progress and prior to project approval), as well as information on approved projects (i.e., projects for which a PSA is complete). Detailed information on these databases is provided in Master Response 6. As explained in Master Response 4, agency coordination during treatment design and prior to treatment implementation is a requirement of several SPRs and mitigation measures, so opportunities for agency input will be provided in those circumstances. Additionally, several SPRs require advance public notification of planned treatments:

* SPR AD-4: Public Notifications for Prescribed Burning
* SPR AD-6: Public Notifications for Treatment Projects
* SPR HAZ-9: Notification of Herbicide Use in the Vicinity of Public Areas
* SPR NOI-6: Notify Nearby Off-Site Noise-Sensitive Receptors
* SPR REC-1: Notify Recreational Users of Temporary Closures

A key mechanism to increase the pace and scale of vegetation treatments in California to reduce wildfire risk, as required by Executive Order B-52-18, is use of the CEQA streamlining approaches provided by Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines for later activities consistent with a Program EIR. This is reinforced, in part, by SB 1260, Statutes of 2018, which provides for this Final PEIR to serve as the programmatic CEQA coverage for prescribed burns within the SRA. The goal of this mechanism is to avoid redundant CEQA document preparation when environmental effects have been covered in the PEIR and the means to protect resources have been put in place through SPRs and mitigation measures, which in turn will increase the pace and scale of vegetation treatments in California to reduce wildfire risk.

As described in the Introduction to the PSA (refer to Section PD-3.1 in Appendix PD-3 in Volume II of this Final PEIR), using the PSA, CAL FIRE or other project proponents will evaluate each vegetation treatment project intended to implement the CalVTP as a later activity addressed by the PEIR to determine whether it qualifies as within the scope of this Final PEIR or requires additional environmental documentation or its own independent environmental review. Such evaluations will ascertain whether a later vegetation treatment project is consistent with the description of activities contained in the CalVTP and whether the effects on the environment were covered in the PEIR. Also, a project proponent will evaluate whether the later activity would (1) cause a new significant effect; (2) cause a significant effect addressed in the PEIR to become substantially more severe; or (3) require a mitigation measure or alternative substantially different from or previously found to be infeasible in the PEIR. If none of those outcomes are determined, and the effects on the environment were covered in the PEIR, the later activity can be found to be within the scope of this Final PEIR, and no additional environmental documentation would be required (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[c][1], [2], and [4]). If a project is within the scope of this Final PEIR, the project proponent may act on the project using the PSA and PEIR without public circulation of an additional environmental document.

If a later vegetation treatment project would not qualify for a within-the-scope finding, additional documentation may need to be prepared that accompanies the PEIR for the project’s CEQA compliance, or independent environmental review and documentation under CEQA must be conducted (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[c][1]). If additional documentation is needed, it may be an ND, MND, or EIR, depending on the environmental impact differences encountered. If a later MND or EIR is prepared, it could be limited in its scope to the new or substantially more severe significant impact, with the PSA checklist documenting the rest of the within-the-scope impacts. CEQA requires public notification and public review periods for each of these documents

Regardless of whether a project is found to be within the scope of the PEIR or an additional environmental document needs to be prepared, if the project is approved, the project proponent would file an NOD that will be made available to the public for a period of 30 days via OPR and/or the county clerk office in which the project will be located.

Any project proponent seeking to use this Final PEIR for CEQA compliance may also choose to conduct public outreach beyond the requirements of CEQA or may conduct additional public outreach in accordance with agency-specific procedures or requirements for public outreach.

### Master Response 6: Public Availability of Information on Vegetation Treatment Projects

Commenters requested the development of a system whereby the public could access information on proposed and approved vegetation treatment projects to, in part, have an opportunity to provide relevant environmental information on proposed projects and track cumulative effects of CalVTP implementation. The Board and CAL FIRE recognize the public and agency interest in implementing the proposed CalVTP and the value of providing open access to treatment project information. They are developing a publicly accessible online database to provide information on proposed projects (i.e., projects for which a PSA is in progress and prior to project approval), as well as a publicly accessible online database to provide information on approved projects (i.e., projects for which a PSA is complete). These databases are in the development process and are anticipated to be available for use by project proponents and the public as close to PEIR certification as possible. The Board will provide notice to those on the PEIR mailing list when these databases become available.

In an effort to collect comprehensive information about treatment projects, SPR AD-7 has been added to the PEIR in Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Final PEIR Volume II, which requires a project proponent to provide basic information about the treatment to the Board or CAL FIRE for proposed projects (prior to PSA completion), approved projects (after PSA completion), and completed projects. The PSA instructions have also been revised to reflect these reporting requirements (refer to “Reporting Requirements” in Section PD-3.2.4 in Appendix PD-3 in Volume II of this Final PEIR). The project proponent of the later treatment project would be responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the information provided to CAL FIRE and the Board and for enforcing or verifying the implementation of any standard project requirements, mitigation measures, or permit conditions.

Additionally, the Board and CAL FIRE will provide training related to CalVTP implementation, including how to complete a PSA and how to provide information to CAL FIRE on proposed, approved and completed projects as required by SPR AD-7, as soon as possible after certification of the PEIR. This training will be available to project proponents, regulatory agencies, and other interested parties. The Board will contact those on the PEIR mailing list via email and post information online when the training is available.

The public notification and public review requirements for proposed vegetation treatment projects seeking to use this Final PEIR for CEQA compliance are explained in Master Response 5.

#### Proposed Vegetation Treatment Projects – PSA In Progress

Prior to approval of a later vegetation treatment project and filing of the associated NOD with OPR, the Board and CAL FIRE, in coordination with CAL FIRE’s Fire Resource Assessment Program (FRAP), will post information for proposed projects to a publicly accessible online database.

Pursuant to SPR AD-7, the information that will be submitted by project proponents and available on the website will include geographic information system (GIS) data that include project location, presented as a point because the footprint may change (e.g., shift or contract) as environmental review progresses and if sensitive resources are identified that can be avoided; projected project size (typically acres); likely treatment types and activities; and contact information for a representative of the project proponent.

The objectives of this database are to provide the public and other interested parties with information about proposed projects and an opportunity to contact the project proponent with relevant environmental information, questions, or concerns during the development of the PSA.

#### Approved Vegetation Treatment Projects – PSA Complete

After approval of a later vegetation treatment project and filing of the associated NOD with OPR, the Board and CAL FIRE, in coordination with FRAP, will post project information to a publicly accessible online database that is separate from the database for proposed projects.

Pursuant to SPR AD-7, the project information that will be submitted by project proponents and available on the website will include:

* a completed PSA Environmental Checklist with MMRP and
* GIS data that include a polygon(s) of the project area, showing the extent of each treatment type included in the project (ecological restoration, fuel break, WUI fuel reduction)

The objectives of this database are to provide the public and other interested parties with information about approved projects, provide environmental resource information about project areas in the form of the PSA, and track the public agencies and projects using the CalVTP PEIR for CEQA compliance.

#### Completed Vegetation Treatment Projects

CAL FIRE headquarters staff will update these databases with the completion status of projects provided to them by CAL FIRE unit managers and other public agency proponents. Pursuant to SPR AD-7, the information for completed projects that will be submitted by project proponents will include GIS data that include a polygon(s) of the treated area, showing the extent of each treatment type implemented (ecological restoration, fuel break, WUI fuel reduction), as well as a Completion Report by CAL FIRE unit managers or similar postproject implementation report with equivalent information submitted by other project proponents. The report will include:

* size of treated area (typically acres);
* treatment types and activities;
* dates of work; and
* a list of the SPRs and mitigation measures that were implemented and any explanations regarding implementation if required by SPRs and mitigation measures (e.g., explanation for feasibility determination required by SPR BIO-12; explanation for reduction of a no-disturbance buffer below the general minimum size described in Mitigation Measures BIO-1a and BIO-2b).

The objectives of collecting this information are to provide the public and other interested parties with information about completed projects, provide an accounting of acres treated under the CalVTP as an indicator of progress in increasing the pace and scale of vegetation treatment, and track cumulative effects of CalVTP implementation.

### Master Response 7: Agency Coordination

Commenters raised issues regarding implementation of vegetation treatment projects on lands under public agency jurisdiction, including requests for CAL FIRE to coordinate with state and local agencies, obtain permits from state and local agencies, and comply with local regulations in the design and implementation of CalVTP treatments.

As explained in additional detail in Master Response 4, vegetation treatment projects under the CalVTP may be directly undertaken by a state or local public agency project proponent, including by CAL FIRE, or vegetation treatment projects may be funded by CAL FIRE or other state agencies through the award of a grant. An awardee that is a public agency could be a project proponent under the CalVTP. If the awardee is a private entity, the grantor agency could remain the project proponent. As discussed in Section 1.5.2, “Responsible Agencies,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, agencies that own large portions of land within the SRA or may approve or issue permits for implementation of treatment projects under the CalVTP are considered responsible agencies pursuant to CEQA. Other types of agencies that own or manage lands within the SRA that could act as responsible agencies (project proponents) under the CalVTP include state agencies, cities, counties, fire districts, water and irrigation districts, conservation districts, park and open space districts, conservation agencies, colleges and universities, community service districts, utility districts, flood control districts, water agencies, transportation authorities, cemetery districts, and airport districts.

As discussed in Section 2.6, “Implementation Framework,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, CAL FIRE may serve as the primary project proponent for treatments on nonfederal land and would also oversee the implementation of vegetation treatment projects by the contract counties. In all cases, the project proponent would coordinate with agencies that share jurisdiction over the land proposed for treatment or resources potentially affected, including designing the treatment to be consistent with applicable state and local regulations (as required by SPR AD-3) and obtaining any applicable permits or authorizations prior to implementing the treatment.

CAL FIRE or another project proponent would implement SPR AD-3 (Consistency with Local Plans, Policies, and Ordinances), which requires the project proponent to design and implement the treatment in a manner that is consistent with applicable local plans, policies, and ordinances to the extent the project is subject to them (see Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR). Through implementation of this SPR and completion of the PSA, the project proponent would address project-specific compliance with local plans, policies, and ordinances and identify any permits that may be required for implementation of a treatment project.

### Master Response 8: Monitoring and Adaptive Management

Commenters expressed that project proponents should conduct monitoring and adaptive management strategies for treatments to determine whether the treatments effectively achieve the intended objectives. Commenters also requested that an MMRP be prepared for the CalVTP.

As discussed in Section 2.6.1, “Adaptive Management – Framework Development and Monitoring,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, monitoring of a later vegetation treatment project would be performed to the extent feasible, recognizing fiscal constraints, the need for ongoing access to property (including private property), and staff availability. As part of the CalVTP, the Board has developed an Adaptive Management Framework. The value of monitoring and adaptive management is the gathering of empirical information from treatment sites (before, during, and after treatment) that can help refine the approaches to vegetation treatment that better meet site-specific project objectives, provide effective wildfire risk reduction, and protect the environment. The CalVTP requires elements that would aid in program implementation, help assess program effectiveness, and provide feedback for adaptive management and decision making. Such elements of the CalVTP include but are not limited to:

* introducing independent science into the CalVTP activities,
* geospatially tracking later vegetation treatment projects through a publicly available geodatabase that is managed by CAL FIRE,
* monitoring implementation of SPRs and mitigation measures to document compliance, and
* monitoring the effectiveness of treatments in achieving desired fuel conditions and other CalVTP objectives applicable to a treatment project.

The effort to construct a database to geospatially track later activities is currently ongoing within CAL FIRE by FRAP, as described in Master Response 6. The CalVTP directs implementation of vegetation treatment projects, that would alter landscape fuels to reduce the size, number, and frequency of wildfire and reduce losses to life, property, and natural resources. Geospatially mapping these activities, using data collected for later treatment projects, would support the tracking and monitoring of site conditions before, during, and after treatment to determine whether the objectives are being met and whether program methods need to be revised. Also see Master Response 6 for additional detail on the process for tracking project information prior to and following completion of treatment projects.

To facilitate implementation of adaptive management and assessment of the effectiveness of treatments in achieving desired fuel conditions and other CalVTP objectives applicable to a treatment project, SPR AD-8, which pertains to the terms of a landowner/land manager’s contract with CAL FIRE to implement vegetation treatment, has been added to Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. SPR AD-8 requires CAL FIRE to request that access to the treated area over a prescribed period (usually up to 3 years) to perform treatment monitoring be included as a contract term. For public landowners, access to the treated area over a prescribed period will be a requirement of the executed contract.

In accordance with Section 15091(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines, which states that the agency shall adopt a program for reporting on or monitoring the changes that it has either required in the project or made a condition of approval to avoid or substantially lessen significant environmental effects, the Board will adopt the MMRP when it approves the proposed CalVTP. Because SPRs are environmental protection actions integrated into the CalVTP program description, the Board will include them in the MMRP, in addition to mitigation measures, although they are not required to do so. The MMRP for the CalVTP PEIR is provided as Appendix B to Volume I of this Final PEIR. In addition, a project-specific MMRP will be completed and attached or otherwise integrated into the PSA prepared for each treatment that identifies the SPRs and mitigation measures applicable to the treatment, the timing for the implementation of each (e.g., prior to or during initial treatment and/or maintenance activities), and the entity(ies) responsible for implementing the SPRs and mitigation measures. The project proponent for each treatment will be responsible for implementing mitigation measures pursuant to Section 15097 of the State CEQA Guidelines. While, CEQA does not mandate that a lead agency monitor whether they succeed in reducing impacts as intended, the addition of SPR AD-8 would strengthen the ability to assess the effectiveness of treatments in achieving desired fuel conditions and other CalVTP objectives.

### Master Response 9: Herbicide Use Effects on Public Health, Biological Resources, and Water Quality

Commenters raised issues related to the impacts of herbicide use on human health, plants and wildlife, riparian areas, and wetlands and waters. Some comments addressed buffers between herbicide application and sensitive resources and limiting the extent of herbicide use, and others requested completely removing herbicide use from the proposed CalVTP.

#### Herbicide Use Effects on Public Health

Under the CalVTP, herbicide application methods are limited to ground application to protect human health and the environment by focusing targeted application on specific vegetation. As described in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, herbicides would be applied only on the ground from equipment on vehicles (including all-terrain vehicles or tractors) or by manual application devices. At the direction of the licensed Pest Control Advisor (PCA), herbicides would be applied to green leaves with a backpack hand-applicator or spray bottle, wick (painted or wiped on), or hand wand (sprayed on) or would be hand applied as pellets to the ground surface. Herbicides may also be applied to trees around the circumference of the trunk on the intact bark (basal bark), to cuts in the trunk or stem (frill, or “hack and squirt”), to cut stems and stumps (paint on cut stumps), or injected into the inner bark with a hypo-hatchet. These ground application methods minimize the potential for herbicides to extend beyond the boundary of an application site. No aerial spraying of herbicides would be allowed under the CalVTP.

As described under Impact HAZ-2 in Section 3.10, “Hazardous Materials, Public Health and Safety,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the herbicides proposed for use under the CalVTP pose low levels of toxicity to humans, although some can result in skin and eye irritation or can be slightly toxic (i.e., possible effects of exposure to a chemical are marginal and not considered toxic) if substantial exposure occurs. As described below, the CalVTP would not result in substantial exposure to herbicides. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) oversees pesticide use and health and safety through the Worker Protection Standard (WPS). The WPS is a regulation for pesticides and herbicides that is aimed at reducing the risk of pesticide poisonings and injuries among workers and pesticide handlers. EPA’s WPS would be followed during the application of all herbicides under the CalVTP. The WPS contains requirements for pesticide safety training, notification of pesticide applications, use of personal protective equipment, restricted-entry intervals after pesticide application, decontamination supplies, and emergency medical assistance. In addition, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (known as Cal/OSHA) has safety standards and practices regarding workplace safety and providing a safe and healthy environment for workers, and the California Pesticide Regulatory Program regulates the sale and use of pesticides in California. Furthermore, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) is responsible for reviewing the toxic effects of pesticide formulations and determining through a registration process whether a pesticide is suitable for use in California. The label includes instructions telling users how to make sure the product is applied only to intended target vegetation and includes precautions that the applicator should take to protect human health and the environment. These include weather parameters, such as a maximum allowable wind speed to avoid drift and avoidance of periods of precipitation to minimize unintended runoff.

In addition to the protections afforded by regulatory compliance, several SPRs would be integrated into treatment design to further minimize the potential for significant public health risks (i.e., SPR HAZ-5 through SPR HAZ-9). These SPRs require project proponents to prepare a Spill Prevention and Response Plan prior to beginning herbicide treatment activities to provide protection to on-site workers, the public, and the environment from accidental leaks or spills of herbicides, adjuvants, or other potential contaminants (SPR HAZ-5); to comply with all herbicide application regulations to protect the safety of workers and the public during the transport, use, storage, and disposal of herbicides (SPR HAZ-6); to triple-rinse herbicide containers with clean water at an approved site and dispose of rinsate per 3 California Code of Regulations (CCR) Section 6684 and dispose of all herbicides following label requirements and waste disposal regulations to avoid direct contamination to a water body or watershed (SPR HAZ-7); to employ techniques during herbicide application to minimize drift (SPR HAZ-8); and to include signage indicating that herbicide application is occurring or has occurred where members of the public could be present within 500 feet of areas receiving herbicide treatments (SPR HAZ-9).

Pursuant to these SPRs and existing laws and regulations, pesticides would be applied under the guidance of licensed and certified personnel and according to label requirements, and they would be stored, loaded, and mixed according to specifications that would protect against spills or entry of chemicals into aquatic features; a Spill Prevention and Response Plan would be prepared prior to beginning any herbicide treatment activities to provide protection to on-site workers, the public, and the environment from accidental leaks or spills of herbicides, adjuvants, or other potential contaminants; and containers would be cleaned up according to guidelines that prevent contamination. All other applicable laws and regulations pertaining to the use of pesticides and safety standards for employees and the public, as governed by EPA and DPR, would be followed. Furthermore, the potential for herbicide drift will be minimized by prohibiting aerial spraying and limiting ground application when winds exceed 7 miles per hour (mph) and through the use of specific, drift-preventing spray nozzles. Notifying the public prior to and following application of herbicides for a specified period at public areas within 500 feet of an application site would allow the public to avoid areas where treatments are occurring or have recently occurred, if so desired.

Implementation of these SPRs and compliance with regulatory requirements allow for effective and safe application of herbicides as needed for proposed vegetation treatment projects under the CalVTP.

#### Herbicide Use Effects on Biological Resources and water quality

Potential impacts on special-status plants and wildlife, habitat, and water quality as a result of herbicide use under the proposed CalVTP are addressed in Impact BIO-1, Impact BIO-2, Impact HAZ-2, and Impact HYD-4 in Chapter 3, “Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

As described under Impact BIO-1 and Impact BIO-2 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, several SPRs and mitigation measures would be implemented to protect special-status plants and wildlife, as well as wetlands and waters, from treatment activities, including the use of herbicides. The relevant SPRs are SPR BIO-1 through SPR BIO-4, SPR BIO-7, SPR BIO-8, and SPR BIO-10, which are described in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resource Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. Among other provisions, these SPRs require data review and reconnaissance-level surveys prior to herbicide application to identify and document sensitive resources, such as riparian or other sensitive habitats, sensitive natural communities, wetlands, and wildlife nursery site or habitat, and to assess the suitability of habitat for special-status plant and animal species. If suitable habitat or sensitive biological resources are identified and cannot be avoided, further review and surveys will be required (SPR BIO-1); crew members and contractors will receive training from a qualified RPF or biologist prior to beginning a treatment project, including herbicide application. The training will describe the appropriate work practices necessary to effectively implement the biological SPRs and mitigation measures and to comply with applicable environmental laws and regulations. Protocol-level surveys for special-status plant species with the potential to be affected by herbicide application must be conducted by a qualified RPF or botanist prior to initiation of treatment if suitable habitat for special-status plant species is identified through SPR BIO-1 and SPR BIO-7. Additionally, project proponents, in consultation with a qualified Registered Professional Forester (RPF) or qualified biologist, will design treatments in riparian habitats to retain or improve habitat functions by allowing only hand application of herbicides approved for use in aquatic systems and only during low-flow periods or when seasonal streams are dry (SPR BIO-4).

In addition, as described under “Potential Effects of the CalVTP” under Impact HYD-4 within Section 3.11.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, SPR HYD-5 would be implemented to avoid and minimize potential impacts from the use of herbicides on nontarget vegetation, special-status species, and wetlands and waters, including water quality, by requiring that herbicide mixing sites be located in areas devoid of vegetation and away from waterways, using only herbicides labeled for use in aquatic environments in riparian habitats or near waters, prohibiting the application of herbicides within 50 feet of special-status plant species and vernal pools, using dyes to help prevent overspray, prohibiting spray application of herbicides when winds are 7 mph or greater, and prohibiting herbicide use during precipitation events or if precipitation occurred within 24 hours before or is forecast within 24 hours after a scheduled application. Additionally, there is no risk of herbicide drift if stem injection, wicking, or paint-on application is used, especially if sensitive plants are dormant at the time of application. The CalVTP does not include aerial application of herbicides. In response to recommendations provided by the State Water Resources Control Board in its comments on the Draft PEIR (see responses to comment letter A17), a measure has been added to SPR HYD-5 that prohibits herbicide application within Class I and II WLPZs unless: herbicide application is necessary to meet program objectives; the applicable regional water quality control board is notified no fewer than 15 days prior to herbicide application; and the reasons it is infeasible to prohibit herbicide application in a WLPZ is documented in the PSA. Restrictions on the use of herbicides within Class III and IV WLPZs will remain dependent on the presence or absence of native riparian vegetation, as required by SPR HYD-5 and SPR BIO-4.

In addition to the SPRs, several mitigation measures would be implemented to further avoid and minimize potential impacts on special-status plants, wildlife, habitat, and wetlands and waters from herbicide application (e.g., Mitigation Measures BIO-1a, BIO-1b, BIO-2a, BIO-2b, BIO-2d, BIO-2e, BIO-2f, BIO-2g, and BIO-4). The mitigation measures would avoid the loss of special-status plants by establishing a no-disturbance buffer around the area occupied by special-status plants and marking the buffer boundary with high-visibility flagging, fencing, stakes, or clear, existing landscape demarcations (e.g., edge of a roadway). The no-disturbance buffers would generally be a minimum of 50 feet from listed plants (Mitigation Measures BIO-1a and BIO-1b). If special-status wildlife species are observed as a result of SPR BIO-1 or SPR BIO-10, treatments would be prohibited within occupied habitat or outside of the sensitive period of the species’ life history (e.g., breeding or nesting season), and the project proponent would establish a no-disturbance buffer around occupied sites (e.g., nests, dens, roosts, middens, burrows, nurseries). Buffer size would be determined by a qualified RPF or biologist; however, buffers would generally be a minimum of 100 feet, unless site conditions indicate a smaller buffer would be sufficient for protection or a larger buffer would be needed. A qualified RPF or qualified biologist would also identify habitat features that are necessary for survival (e.g., habitat necessary for breeding, foraging, shelter, movement) of the affected wildlife species (e.g., trees with complex structure, trees with large cavities, trees with nesting platforms; dens; tree snags; large raptor nests [including inactive nests]; downed woody debris). These habitat features would be marked, and treatments applied to the features would be designed to minimize or avoid the loss or degradation of suitable habitat for listed species during treatments (Mitigation Measures BIO-2a and BIO-2b); require protective measures for specific special-status species and habitat, including valley elderberry longhorn beetle (Mitigation Measure BIO-2d), special-status butterfly host plants (Mitigation Measure BIO-2e), special-status beetle/fly/grasshopper/snail habitat (Mitigation Measure BIO-2f), and special-status bumble bees (Mitigation Measure BIO-2g); and establish a minimum buffer of 25 feet around wetlands where herbicide application would be prohibited.

Implementation of these SPRs and mitigation measures would effectively avoid and minimize potential impacts from herbicide application under the CalVTP on special-status plants and wildlife, habitat (including riparian), and wetlands and waters, including water quality.

#### Need for Additional Application Limitations or prohibition of herbicide use

Implementation of the SPRs and mitigation measures described above would avoid and minimize impacts from herbicide application on sensitive biological resources, including wetlands, special-status species, and sensitive habitats, such as riparian areas, as well as water quality. Further, the proposed CalVTP limits herbicide use to ground application methods to protect sensitive resources and apply compounds only to targeted vegetation. Implementation of these protections and compliance with the requirements of the herbicide label would effectively minimize the potential risks to water quality, special-status species, riparian habitats, and other sensitive habitats from herbicide application under the CalVTP. Additional limitations on herbicide application, such as additional buffers and exclusion areas or further prohibition of use or monitoring for detection in surface waters, including during maintenance, are not necessary to maintain impacts at or reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level. However, in response to recommendations provided by the State Water Resources Control Board in its comments on the Draft PEIR (see responses to comment letter A17), additional protections for water quality have been integrated into SPR HYD-5, including provisions to notify the applicable regional water quality control board, as described above.

In consideration of the target vegetation and the presence of sensitive resources as described above, herbicides would be an effective vegetation treatment method for improving weed control and reducing the need for treatment maintenance and retreatment. Reduced treatment maintenance and retreatment would also reduce associated disturbance-related environmental impacts and the cost of the vegetation treatment projects.

## Comments and Responses

The written comments received on the Draft PEIR before the close of the public review period and the responses to those comments are presented below. Each comment is reproduced in its entirety and is followed by the response. Each comment letter is presented in its entirety in Appendix A to Volume I of this Final PEIR. In the comment letters presented in Appendix A, a line bracket and an identifying comment number is included for each comment in the margin of the comment letter; the bracket and comment number correspond to the comments presented in this section.

As stated under Section 2.1, “List of Commenter on the Draft PEIR,” comment letters received after the close of the public review period do not raise any issues that have not been addressed by comment letters received before the close of the public review period. These letters also are presented in Appendix A, but comments in these letters have not been bracketed, and no responses to comments have been provided. In addition, responses have not been provided to comment letters submitted on prior EIRs for the Vegetation Treatment Program; these letters are not reproduced in Appendix A.

### Agencies

Letter A1 **Marin County Fire Department**

Jason Weber, Fire Chief

July 16, 2019

###### Comment A1-1

Marin County Fire Department supports the CalVTP to expand Marin County’s vegetation treatment activities implemented by Marin County Fire Agencies, the public and local partners. Marin County recognizes the urgent need to increase vegetation treatment options to modify fire behavior to aid in reducing losses to life, property and natural resources.

###### Response A1-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A1-2

The CalVTP programmatic EIR will boost the ability to implement the Marin County’s Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP, 2016) adopted by Marin County Board of Supervisors with significant collaboration between land management agencies, fire departments, communities and land owners’ which guides work to reduce the threat of wildfire to its residents. This plan has prioritized fuel reduction projects including WUI treatments and high priority fuel breaks utilizing combinations of prescribed fire, mechanical and manual treatment methods.

###### Response A1-2

The Marin County’s prioritization of WUI and fuel break treatments is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A1-3

The CalVTP is consistent and in direct alignment with the Marin County Fire Department’s Strategic Unit Fire Plan which clearly identifies the need to modify fire behavior thru vegetation/fuel reduction specifically utilizing strategically placed treatments focused to protect Marin’s numerous values at risk.

###### Response A1-3

The consistency of the CalVTP with Marin County’s Strategic Unit Fire Plan is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A1-4

Additionally, the VTP provides a streamlined CEQA compliant program which will reduce the compliance barriers associated for local landowners seeking to utilize grants, private funds and other cooperative efforts to achieve high priority fire hazard reduction work.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this vital program.

###### Response A1-4

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP and CEQA streamlining will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A2 **Orange County Fire Authority**

Brian Fennessy, Fire Chief

July 22, 2019

###### Comment A2-1

The proposed Vegetation Treatment Program Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (VTP PEIR) is supported by the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) for its emphasis on protecting life, property, and natural resources through vegetation management options to modify fire behavior. The ability to use this VTP will allow OCFA and our partners to efficiently plan and implement projects, with hopes of reducing the size and scale of our fires by modifying vegetation composition and structure.

###### Response A2-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A2-2

Treatments described in the VTP are consistent with the OCFA Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), which identifies and prioritizes fuel reduction and modification projects that would occur under this VTP PEIR. The VTP would provide the streamlined CEQA analysis for these projects, which would significantly reduce the need for repetitive process of multiple CEQA documents, as well as the cost and time to the department and landowners with limited resources.

###### Response A2-2

The CalVTP’s consistency with the OCFA CWPP is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A2-3

The VTP is consistent and in direct alignment with the OCFA's Strategic Unit Fire Plan, which clearly identifies the need to modify fire behavior through vegetation and fuel reduction methods, specifically utilizing strategically placed treatments focused to protect Orange County's numerous values at risk.

###### Response A2-3

The CalVTP’s consistency with OCFA's Strategic Unit Fire Plan is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A2-4

The ability to allow for ecological restoration within the VTP will also allow OCFA to better create and implement fuel reduction and modification projects within our SRA. Much of Orange County's SRA is owned and managed by conservancies for threatened and endangered species. This VTP will allow OCFA to create and implement win-win projects that both aid in fuel reduction and modification, while also creating and enhancing habitat for endangered species.

###### Response A2-4

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A2-5

The ability to plan and manage fire at a landscape scale is becoming more and more important, as a year­round fire season has become the “new normal,” and fires are becoming more frequent, more intense, and threaten increasing numbers of lives and prope1iy. The implementation of this VTP EIR is much needed and much overdue.

###### Response A2-5

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A3 **City of Laguna Beach**

John Pietig, City Manager

July 23, 2019

###### Comment A3-1

The City of Laguna Beach appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Vegetation Treatment Program (CAL VTP), and would like to offer the following for consideration:

1. Projects considered and funded by the CAL VTP should include vegetated areas within and adjacent to incorporated cities, and not be solely confined to wildland areas classified as State Responsibility Area (SRA) wildlands. Significant populations and values are concentrated in these areas of the State that have proven susceptible to large and damaging wildfires. Incorporated areas within cities should be considered for CAL VTP programs.

###### Response A3-1

As described in Section 1.2.1, “Governing Regulations,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, in accordance with PRC Sections 4113 and 4125, CAL FIRE is responsible for preventing and extinguishing wildland fires in the SRA. The SRA is land that provides forest or range products, watersheds not owned or managed by the federal government or within the boundaries of incorporated cities, and where CAL FIRE has the primary financial responsibility for preventing and suppressing fires. A Local Responsibility Area (LRA) is land where local agencies have the primary financial responsibility for preventing and suppressing fires. As further described in Section 2.1, “Overview of the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the treatable landscape is the portion of the SRA where vegetation conditions are suitable for treatment. The CalVTP includes treatments throughout the treatable landscape, including the WUI, the focus of which is to strategically reduce vegetation density and remove fuel to directly protect communities.

The CalVTP does not preclude treatments by other agencies outside of the treatable landscape; however, it does not provide funding for any treatments.

Refer to response to comment A21-1 regarding the factors that could be considered by the project proponent in using the PEIR for treatment areas outside of the treatable landscape.

###### Comment A3-2

2. Vegetation treatment projects should be exempt from additional Coastal Act review if approved under CAL VTP guidelines and CEQA. Currently, coastal zone projects that are fully approved by CEQA and CAL FIRE must also be submitted to a lengthy and costly additional process through the California Coastal Commission. The additional review adds hundreds of thousands of dollars and a year or more of additional delay to these critical projects.

###### Response A3-2

As discussed under “Coastal Zone” in Section 3.12.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the coastal zone is within the jurisdiction of the California Coastal Commission. As further discussed under “California Coastal Act” in Section 3.12.2, “Regulatory Setting,” all treatment projects in the coastal zone that qualify as “development” under the definition presented in PRC Section 30106 would require a coastal development permit (CDP) pursuant to the Coastal Act. The commenter’s suggestion that CalVTP vegetation treatment projects should be exempt from additional Coastal Act review is noted; however, the power to create any such broadly applicable exemption like the one suggested by the commenter would lie with the Legislature, not the Board or CAL FIRE.

###### Comment A3-3

3. The City of Laguna Beach believes that fuel treatments to benefit the Wildland-Urban Interface are best located adjacent to homes rather than in remote or distant wildlands. Projects that protect homes, and place vegetative treatments next to homes, should be prioritized higher than other projects in remote areas.

###### Response A3-3

As discussed under “Wildland-Urban Interface Fuel Reduction” in Section 2.5.1, “Description of Treatment Type,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the CalVTP includes treatments throughout the treatable landscape, including the WUI treatment type, the focus of which is to strategically reduce vegetation density and fuel to directly protect communities.

###### Comment A3-4

4. The CAL VTP program should also include the hardening of major roadway escape routes and utility corridors in wildland areas adjacent to communities at risk.

###### Response A3-4

Vegetation treatments under the CalVTP may be implemented along roadways or in utility corridors to achieve these objectives.

###### Comment A3-5

5. The CAL FIRE VTP currently makes no provision for hardening of structures against wind-borne embers due to major wildfires. The fuel treatments proposed in CAL VTP are generally designed for creation of fuel breaks that are most effective against fires moving with ground trajectory. The most damaging major wildfires in California are frequently wind-borne fires that cast firebrands and embers over fuel breaks to ignite homes. Hardening existing homes is a critical component of reducing wildfire loss in California but is ignored in the proposed program. The CAL VTP should be expanded to include hardening of homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface as a means of protecting lives and reducing wildfire property loss.

###### Response A3-5

Refer to Master Response 1 regarding nonvegetation treatments.

###### Comment A3-6

6. The CAL VTP should allow for use of State funds to augment local fire services and contract resources to accomplish VTP projects and work. Currently, a lack of available qualified contractors limits the production of desired projects. CAL VTP should allow for use of program assets and funds to develop local resources for vegetation clearance.

###### Response A3-6

The CalVTP itself does not allocate funding. It would be the responsibility of the project proponent agency to request or secure funding for increasing or augmenting staff resources, if determined by the agency to be needed.

Letter A4 **County of El Dorado Board of Supervisors**

Sue Novasel, Chair

July 23, 2019

###### Comment A4-1

As destructive wildfires continue in our rural environments and beyond, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors provide this letter to support the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection and their CalVTP program.

• This program will assist in expanding statewide vegetation treatment activities up to 500,000 acres per year to achieve the goal established in Executive Order B-52-18.

• This program will provide a robust environmental analysis as required by CEQA as well as project-level mitigation measures to help ensure the protection of public trust resources (water, air, wildlife, archaeology, greenhouse gas, etc.)

The CalVTP treatments include:

• Wildland-Urban Interface fuel reduction, including removal of vegetation to prevent or slow the spread of fires between wild lands and structures.

• Fuel breaks that support fire suppression activities by providing emergency responders with strategic staging areas and access to otherwise remote landscapes for fire control.

• Restoration in ecosystems where natural fire regimes have been altered due to fire exclusion, including restoring ecological process, conditions, and resiliency to more closely reflect historic vegetative composition, structure, and habitat values.

• Prescribed burning, mechanical and manual fuels treatment, prescribed herbivory, and limited herbicide use, where appropriate.

###### Response A4-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A4-2

The program and its defined treatments are in alignment with our efforts as it relates to the protection of residents and structures through clearing and vegetation removal. These efforts have been reinforced through the recent passage of our El Dorado County Vegetation Management Ordinance. Understanding some of the other elements of the CalVTP program will require environmental study and therefore extended timelines, we would encourage you to push ahead to strengthen the enforcement of California Public Resources Code 4291.

We appreciate the unified message to address this critical issue that affects us all and with this letter the Board of Supervisors of El Dorado County support the passage of the California Vegetation Treatment Program.

###### Response A4-2

The consistency of the CalVTP with the El Dorado County Vegetation Management Ordinance and the county’s support for strengthening PRC Section 4291 is noted. No further response is warranted.

Letter A5 **County of Fresno, Department of Public Health**

David Pomaville, Director of Public Health and Assistant Emergency Services Director

July 26, 2019

###### Comment A5-1

Eastern Fresno County is “ground zero” for the tree mortality crisis in California. The rapid change our forest ecosystem suffered has been brought about by a prolonged drought and exacerbated by a history of poor forest management practices over the past century. The level of neglected overcrowded stands, dense vegetation, and tree mortality within our territory is overwhelming. Consequently, the majority of our region ranks within Tier 1 or Tier 2 High Hazard Zones. The threat of catastrophic wildfire and devastation to our ecosystems, residents, and communities is alarming.

###### Response A5-1

The discussion of tree mortality in eastern Fresno County is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A5-2

Regardless of the contributing factors, additional fuel removal treatments must be introduced beyond roadside hazard tree removal and fuel breaks. The proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (Cal VTP) helps fill this gap. The Board of Forestry and CAL Fire's proposed Cal VTP will increase vegetation treatment from 250,000 acres to 500,000 acres statewide, increase the use of prescribed burning as a vegetation treatment tool, and contribute to meeting California's greenhouse gas emission goals by managing forests and other natural and working lands.

###### Response A5-2

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A5-3

The proposed Cal VTP is not only consistent with Fresno County Response Objectives, but it is necessary to increase the removal of fuel from the forest floor to provide reasonable levels of community protection. Communities, forests, and resources within the County of Fresno will benefit directly from future Cal VTP projects. We support the proposed Cal VTP and sincerely hope you will approve it as proposed.

###### Response A5-3

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A6 **Butte County Federal/State Land-Use Coordinating Committee**

Dennis Schmidt, Director of Public Works

August 2, 2019

###### Comment A6-1

In response to the Notice requesting comments on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP), the Butte County Federal/State Land-Use Committee (Committee) is communicating its support of the proposed program. The Committee is a Board appointed, Brown Act committee, whose purpose is to provide for public input on public land management issues and communicate concerns, ideas and comment to the Butte County Board of Supervisors (the Board). The Board generated a letter demonstrating their strong support of this program dated 1-09-18 (see attached).

###### Response A6-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A6-2

The Committee wishes to reiterate the Board's support of this program as it is critical to protection of our forest and grasslands, and especially to our vulnerable residents living in and near those lands. The Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the VTP adequately analyzed the potential environmental impacts that may occur from undertaking the VTP. Further, the PEIR clearly identified the limitations of the program in regards to environmental impacts and the mitigation measures that will minimize those impacts. For the health and well-being of those facing wildfire risks, we strongly encourage the California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Board to accept the PEIR and begin implementation of the VTP.

###### Response A6-2

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A6-3

The Board's letter references Butte County's four catastrophic wildfires in 2017. We routinely face wildfire devastation along the vast wildland-urban interface (WUI). Unfortunately, 2018 brought the devastating Camp Fire to Butte County, destroying the community of Concow and the Town of Paradise along with nearby unincorporated areas. “The Butte County community, primarily through the leadership of the Butte County Fire Safe Council, have taken considerable efforts to reduce wildfire fuels and risk. However, local wildfire fuels reduction programs continue to be stymied by existing rules and procedures that are outdated, inefficient, and costly. Under current rules, wild land fire prevention programs require conducting a project-by-project Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which results in increased costs and delays without any environmental benefit. A typical project can take up to 3 years to go through the EIR process. In the case of a small 45 acre project, the EIR costs alone could be $45,000. The cost of conducting an EIR has increased from 2-5% to 10-15% of project costs, and has become a major cost component of wildfire reduction programs. The increased cost of conducting EIRs comes at the expense of wildfire fuel reduction projects. Having the ability to work under the VTP would have enormous benefit without posing adverse impacts to the environment.”

###### Response A6-3

The discussion of wildfire in Butte County and the time and financial cost of preparing an EIR for wildland fire prevention programs are noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A6-4

“The VTP describes a well-reasoned strategy to reduce wildfire fuel threat on SRA lands on a state wide scale. The program has undergone extensive review and refinement over the past four years. The treatment activities such as manual (hand crew work), mechanical, prescribed herbivory, and targeted ground application of herbicides are clearly described with appropriate limitations. The VTP PEIR adequately assessed the potential impact from the VTP as it is implemented in the wild land urban interface (WUI), including strategically placed fuel breaks and ecological restoration. The VTP PEIR offers the right balance of a state-wide program, local implementation and environmental safeguards. Given the enormity of statewide wildfire risks, adoption of the VTP is long overdue.”

###### Response A6-4

The commenter’s statement that the PEIR adequately addressed impacts from the CalVTP is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A6-5

The Butte County Board of Supervisors offered its support for the VTP in 2018, firmly believing the draft VTP PEIR adequately analyzed the potential environmental impacts that may occur from undertaking the VTP. The Committee strongly recommends the California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Board accept the PEIR and implement the VTP.

Thank you for the opportunity to communicate support for this vital program.

###### Response A6-5

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A7 **University of California, Santa Clara County Cooperative Extension**

Sheila Barry, Bay Area Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor

August 2, 2019

###### Comment A7-1

Below are some comments regarding the California Vegetation Treatment Program. I appreciate the inclusion of prescribed herbivory, however there seems to be some confusion in the program description about what prescribed herbivory includes. This lack of clarity creates confusion throughout the document. As defined early in the document, prescribed herbivory (also known as “targeted grazing” [ASI 2006, Macon 2019]) is the use of domestic livestock to accomplish specific and measurable vegetation management objectives. This definition does not restrict prescribed herbivory to short duration, high intensity grazing. The impacts stated in this document generally reflect specific impacts from short duration, high intensity grazing and not broadly prescribed grazing.

###### Response A7-1

As discussed under “Prescribed Herbivory” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, short-term treatments can be used to reduce flammable vegetation, while longer-term treatments can be used to change vegetation composition by depleting root carbohydrates in perennials and reducing the soil seed bank for annual plants (Nader et al. 2007). The timing and duration of prescribed herbivory treatments would vary depending upon the vegetation type, type of animal, and objectives of the treatment. Potential impacts associated with prescribed herbivory are discussed throughout Chapter 3, “Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. Short duration, high-intensity grazing is generally more intensive than low-intensity grazing for a longer period. The PEIR focuses on the potential for significant impacts from treatments consistent with Section 15126.2 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

###### Comment A7-2

Although in some cases grazing a large number of animals in a small site for a very short time may be practical and an effective resource management tool, it is more common (at least in terms of acreage) for prescribed grazing in California to be practiced across extensive areas with low density of animals over a longer period of time. The management and impacts of different grazing systems to implement prescribed grazing should be considered in this document and should be considered in determining the best treatments for a given site. I have included some comments that attempt to present a broader perspective of prescribed grazing systems and potential impacts.

###### Response A7-2

Refer to response to comment A7-1 regarding consideration of different grazing systems in the PEIR.

###### Comment A7-3

Page 2‐19

Table 2-4 Relative Likelihood of Implementing Treatment Activities by Fuel Type for each Treatment Type

| Treatment Activity | Tree WUI | Tree Fuel Break | Tree Ecosystem Restoration | Shrub WUI | Shrub Fuel Break | Shrub Ecosystem Restoration | Grass WUI | Grass Fuel Break | Grass Ecosystem Restoration |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Prescribed Burning | L | M | M | L | M | L | M | M | H |
| Manual Treatments | H | M | M | M | M | M | L | L | L |
| Mechanical Treatments | H | H | H | H | L | M | M | M | L |
| Herbicides | M | M | L | L | M | L | L | L | L |
| Prescribed Herbivory | L | L | L | L | M | L | L | M | M |

Notes: H: high; M: medium; L: low

Comment 1: What is the source of the information for Table 2‐4? Prescribed burning of grass makes little sense unless it’s timed to control an undesirable grass species like medusahead. Many of California’s grassland are annual and burning annual grass for fuels management should not be promoted. Burning annual grasslands is also not an effective tool for ecosystem restoration unless its specifically timed to control an undesirable plant species. Fire fuel load and ecosystem management of annual grasslands is best achieved by managing the cover, height and biomass of annual plants. This requires annual management, which makes grazing ideal. Grazing can also create a more desirable heterogenous vegetation structure that supports biodiversity (see Bartolome et al. 2014). [https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Grazing‐for‐Biodiversity‐in‐Californian‐Grasslands‐Bartolome‐Allen‐D%C3%ADaz/0c6e714584d08e64c25a3bf3d8217409644cc789?utm\_source=email](https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Grazing%E2%80%90for%E2%80%90Biodiversity%E2%80%90in%E2%80%90Californian%E2%80%90Grasslands%E2%80%90Bartolome%E2%80%90Allen%E2%80%90D%C3%ADaz/0c6e714584d08e64c25a3bf3d8217409644cc789?utm_source=email)

It’s not realistic to expect prescribed burning to provide annual management. Revise the table as follows:

| Treatment | Grass |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | WUI | Fuel Break | Ecosystem Restoration |
| Prescribed Burning | L | L | L |
| Mechanical Treatments | M | M | M |
| Herbicides | L | L | L |
| Prescribed Herbivory | H | M | H |

###### Response A7-3

Table 2-4 shows which treatment activity would most likely be used given the treatment type, presenting CAL FIRE’s general estimate of the relative likelihood of a given treatment activity occurring based on treatment type and fuel type, based on CAL FIRE’s experience implementing vegetation treatments in California. However, as further discussed in Section 2.5.2, the treatment activity or activities would be selected by the project proponent based on several parameters, including:

* characteristics of the site such as size; distribution, density, life cycle, and life stage during which plants are most affected by treatment; soil characteristics; weather conditions; and proximity to sensitive areas;
* ability and willingness of landowner to maintain treated area;
* effectiveness and cost of the treatment methods and follow-up maintenance requirements;
* potential for adverse environmental effects;
* objectives for the site;
* historic and current conditions;
* opportunities to preserve desirable vegetation and wildlife habitat;
* available funding;
* success of past treatments, or treatments conducted under similar conditions;
* recommendations by local experts and input from local community;
* primary land use (e.g., WUI, forestry, range, open space);
* accessibility of the site; and
* topography, slope, and aspect of the site.

###### Comment A7-4

Also consider the GHG emission from burning versus grazing 1,000 lbs of grass (dry weight) burning is a good alternative. Burning 1,000 lbs of dry annual grass generates 5 lbs of particulates, 1,829 lbs of CO2 equivalent (Urbanski et al. 2009, Ito and Penner 2004, Boubel et al. 1969). Grazing 1,000 lbs of annual grass feeds one cow for one month and she produces 375 lbs of CO2 equivalent (in methane). (DeRamus et al. 2003, Harper et al. 1999).

###### Response A7-4

The comment is consistent with the emissions estimates summarized in Table 3.8-3 under Impact GHG-2 in Section 3.8.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, which indicates that, on a per-acre basis, prescribed burning of grassland generates more carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e) than prescribed herbivory. Table 3.4-6 under Impact AQ-1 in Section 3.4.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, which summarizes the emission rates of criteria air pollutants and precursors from different treatment types, also indicates that burning grassland generates more particulate emissions than prescribed herbivory.

###### Comment A7-5

Page 2‐25

Comment 2: Consider amending the following text in Section 2‐25: “Animals are best selected according to the types of vegetation that need to be managed. Goats are typically best suited to shrubs, and cattle are better suited to herbaceous plants, especially grasses. Sheep tend to prefer herbaceous plants, but they can be used in a variety of environments.”

A “variety of environments” is confusing since the rest of the information is about vegetation types, and should be Dietary preference among species is not absolute as diet is also driven by the availability of vegetation, nutritional needs, experiences and inherited and learned behaviors.

Much of this EIR seems to assume that prescribed grazing will be short duration, high intensity grazing but it shouldn’t be limited in this way.

###### Response A7-5

As requested by the commenter, clarification of grazing preferences for sheep has been added under “Prescribed Herbivory”; refer to Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A7-6

Comment 3: Prescribed grazing or herbivory isn’t typically a “treatment”. Consider the stated definition, “Prescribed herbivory (also known as “targeted grazing” [ASI 2006, Macon 2019]) is the use of domestic livestock to accomplish specific and measurable vegetation management objectives,” at the beginning of Section 2‐25. As such, amend the following statement… “Successful herbivory treatments can enhance habitat for wildlife. Consider instead, “Prescribed grazing can enhance habitat for wildlife in addition to controlling fire fuel loads.”

Please note there is nothing in the definition of prescribed herbivory that requires high intensity short duration grazing. While high intensity short duration grazing may work to achieve some resource management objectives on some sites, prescribed grazing can also be conducted with long‐term extensive grazing systems.

###### Response A7-6

As requested by the commenter, text regarding controlling fire fuel loads has been added under “Prescribed Herbivory”; refer to Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. Refer also to response to comment A7-1 regarding consideration of different grazing systems in the PEIR.

###### Comment A7-7

Comment 4. In addition to the example of thinning understory to improve shrubs for deer and wildlife, consider including an example that is more typical in California’s annual grasslands, for instance…

In addition, using livestock grazing to minimize thatch and control non‐native plant cover and height can improve habitat for many of California’s native plants and animals including San Joaquin kit fox, Ohlone tiger beetle, western burrowing owl and grasshopper sparrow.

###### Response A7-7

The commenter’s requested text revisions are noted. Effects on special-status species, including those identified by the commenter, are addressed in Section 3.4, “Biological Resources,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A7-8

Comment 5. As stated before, consider removing the word “treatment” and replace with “prescribed herbivory or grazing” i.e. “For prescribed herbivory to be effective, the right combination of animals, stocking rates, timing, and rest must be used.”

###### Response A7-8

The use of “treatment” is consistent with the terminology used throughout the PEIR. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A7-9

Comment 7. This statement should be deleted or cited. “Additionally, prescribed herbivory should be restricted during critical growth stages of desirable competing plant species. When desirable species are present, the area needs a period without herbivory to allow the desirable species to recover.” If cited, context should be provided as this statement is not accurate for prescribed grazing of California’s annual grasslands. Not all desirable species need “recovery” as they may not be selected by livestock. It may be more important to manage the undesirable species than “rest” the desirable species to achieve the site objectives.

###### Response A7-9

As requested by the commenter, text regarding restricting herbivory during critical growth stages of desirable competing plant species has been deleted from the “Prescribed Herbivory” section; refer to Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A7-10

Comment 8. This statement requires additional explanation or it should be deleted. “Short‐term treatments can be used to reduce flammable vegetation, while longer term treatments can be used to change vegetation composition by depleting root carbohydrates in perennials and reducing the soil seed bank for annual plants (Nader et al. 2007).” On California’s annual grasslands long‐term prescribed grazing with extensive livestock grazing may be most desirable to manage fire fuel loads while meeting other conservation objectives including improving habitat for special status species.

###### Response A7-10

To provide additional explanation, text indicating that both short-term and long-term treatments can be used to reduce flammable vegetation has been added under “Prescribed Herbivory”; refer to Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A7-11

Comment 9. “Typical prescribed herbivory costs range from $500 to $1,200 per acre.” When prescribed herbivory requires continuous livestock management and construction or development of livestock management infrastructure, costs range from $500 to $1,200; however, prescribed herbivory can also be achieved with minimal costs that can be covered by livestock production. Lower cost prescribed herbivory is most common on extensive sites that have adequate livestock management infrastructure.

###### Response A7-11

The PEIR indicates that the costs provided are typical and not exhaustive. However, as requested by the commenter, additional text regarding the variability of costs of prescribed herbivory treatments has been added under “Prescribed Herbivory”; refer to Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A7-12

Page 2‐42

Comment 10. Wildlife‐Friendly fencing should require a qualified CRM as neither a RPF or biologist may be qualified to understand what sort of fencing or how to configure the fencing to best control livestock.

###### Response A7-12

SPR-BIO-11 (Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resource Standard Project Requirements”) in Volume II of this Final PEIR states that the project proponent will require a qualified RPF or qualified biologist to review and approve fencing design for prescribed herbivory to ensure that the risk of wildlife entanglement in the fencing is low. The commenter states that a qualified Certified Rangeland Manager should select and configure the fencing to best control livestock. This statement is compatible with SPR-BIO-11, which states that a qualified RPF or qualified biologist will approve fencing design, not select the type or configure the fencing. A project proponent may consult a Certified Rangeland Manager (CRM) for these aspects of fencing. The requirement to have a qualified RPF or qualified biologist approve fencing design is to ensure that the fencing does not impact special-status wildlife.

###### Comment A7-13

Comment 11. Suspending grazing during rain is not practical or necessary. Prescribed grazing is conducted during rainfall events throughout California. Decisions about grazing management should be made based upon the resource need and not a “chance” of rain. Many of California’s rainfall events wouldn’t be characterized as “heavy precipitation”.

###### Response A7-13

When soil is wet, it is particularly susceptible to compaction (Adams 1998); the hooves of ungulates can compact soil during prescribed herbivory treatments, which can lead to erosion. In order to avoid increased risk of soil compaction, SPR GEO-1 limits prescribed herbivory as a treatment activity during conditions where soil could be wet. As stated in SPR GEO-1, grazing may resume when precipitation stops and soils are no longer saturated.

###### Comment A7-14

Page 2‐45

Comment 12. “SPR HYD‐3 Water Quality Protections for Prescribed Herbivory: The project proponent will include the following water quality protections for all prescribed herbivory treatments:

* Environmentally sensitive areas such as waterbodies, wetlands, or riparian areas will be identified and excluded from prescribed herbivory project areas using temporary fencing or active herding. A buffer of approximately 50 feet will be maintained between sensitive and actively grazed areas.
* Water will be provided for grazing animals in the form of an on‐site stock pond or a portable water source located outside of environmentally sensitive areas.
* Grazing animals will be herded out of an area if accelerated soil erosion is observed.”

What is the source of this recommendation? They aren’t necessarily appropriate and these practices are in conflict with one another. On‐site stock ponds are waterbodies and also support several special status species in many cases. Neither a buffer or exclusion is generally desirable. Prescribed grazing is currently being used to manage many “environmentally sensitive areas” including wetlands and riparian areas. Whether or not these areas are included in the project should depend on the objectives and resource needs. A 50‐foot buffer (an area with unmanaged vegetation) could create a resource concern depending on the site and resources. It would be more effective to state that sensitive resources will be identified and excluded from prescribed grazing if appropriate for their protection as determined by a CRM.

Accelerated soil erosion on a site indicates the management and oversight is lagging. Livestock grazing should be managed to maintain sufficient vegetation to protect soils from erosion.

The above comment also applies to 3.6‐127, 3.7‐23, 3‐11‐21.

###### Response A7-14

SPR HYD-3 is based on the recommendations of the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Range Management Advisory Committee specifically targeted at addressing prescribed herbivory projects implemented through the CalVTP. SPR HYD-3 differentiates between water features that are created specifically to provide a water source for grazing animals (stock ponds) and other waterbodies and environmentally sensitive areas. It is understood that grazing in environmentally sensitive areas may not always result in adverse effects; however, its inclusion in the proposed project would create an additional layer of management complexity and risk that is not easily addressed at a statewide scale. To reduce the complexity of SPRs and minimize the need for mitigation, SPR HYD-3 excludes prescribed herbivory from environmentally sensitive areas. As described in Section 2.5.4, “Treatment Activities Excluded from the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, treatments beyond those included in the CalVTP would be independently assessed to determine potential impacts and the appropriate level of environmental documentation. This could include the use of prescribed herbivory in areas where it is excluded by SPRs under the CalVTP.

SPR HYD-3 requires removal of grazing animals from an area if accelerated erosion is observed. Because any erosion caused by prescribed herbivory treatment would be located in upland areas, separated from sensitive resources by the previously described 50-foot buffer, the potential increase in erosion would be unlikely to result in a significant loss of topsoil or threat to water quality. Additionally, as described in SPR GEO-3, areas where erosion is identified after prescribed herbivory will be stabilized immediately after treatment activities to minimize the potential for substantial sediment discharge.

###### Comment A7-15

Page 3.6‐20

Comment 13. Grazing is not necessarily a threat to riparian habitats. Prescribed or managed grazing can be used to effectively manage vegetation including invasive species in riparian habitats. Amend statement to state:
“Riparian habitats face many threats including….inappropriate grazing…”

###### Response A7-15

The page referenced by the commenter under “Riparian Habitats” in Section 3.6.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been revised to clarify that poorly managed grazing is a threat to riparian habitats.

###### Comment A7-16

Page 3.6‐142

Comment 14. Consider revising the following statement since many special‐ status species are not only acclimated they actually benefit from managed livestock grazing. “Some special‐status wildlife species may be acclimated to the presence of livestock. For example, golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos) and Swainson’s hawk are known to nest within or adjacent to rangeland or agricultural habitat.”

Consider, “Many special‐status wildlife species in California benefit from managed livestock grazing (Bartolome et al. 2014). For example, golden eagle and Swainson’s hawk are known to nest within or adjacent to rangeland or agricultural habitat.”

###### Response A7-16

This comment slightly misinterprets the intention of the referenced sentence found under Impact BIO-2, “Tree-Nesting and Cavity-Nesting Wildlife,” in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. The commenter requests revisions of this text to indicate that special-status wildlife species in California benefit from managed livestock grazing. The reference provided by the commenter provides justification for the habitat-related benefits of livestock grazing. Impact BIO-2 specifically refers to impacts due to the presence of livestock (e.g., cows, sheep, goats), and the potential that these animals will be a disturbance source if in close proximity to nesting wildlife during prescribed herbivory treatment. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A7-17

Page 3.6‐176‐177

Comment 15. Please cite the source of your information that cattle more than sheep or goats will crush burrows. Cattle grazing is an important tool for managing habitat for California’s special status amphibians and reptiles. The USFWS has recognized the benefit of grazing to maintain habitat for numerous burrowing species in California including SJ kit fox, burrowing owl, Red Legged Frog, Tiger Salamander.

###### Response A7-17

The statement to which the commenter refers under Impact BIO-2, “Tree-Nesting and Cavity-Nesting Wildlife,” in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been deleted because a citation for the statement could not be found, and the statement is not germane to the analysis or conclusions of the PEIR.

###### Comment A7-18

Page 3.7‐27

Comment 16. The information (citation) regarding grazing and geomorphology is dated (1995) and may not be relevant to California’s rangelands. Consider Salls et al. 2018. http://calag.ucanr.edu/archive/?type=pdf&article=ca.2018a0021 Spatial variability with regards to erosion potential is extremely important.

###### Response A7-18

A reference to Salls et al. 2018 was added to Table 3.7-4 under Impact GEO-1 in Section 3.7.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A7-19

Comment 17. The EIR should consider the difference in GHG emissions from different control methods. For example, burning 1,000 lbs of dry annual grass generates 5 lbs of particulates, 1,829 lbs of CO2 equivalent (Urbanski et al. 2009, Ito and Penner 2004, Boubel et al. 1969). Grazing 1,000 lbs of annual grass feeds one cow for one month and she produces 375 lbs of CO2 equivalent (in methane). (DeRamus et al. 2003, Harper et al. 1999).

###### Response A7-19

Refer to response to comment A7-4 concerning the levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) and particulate emissions from prescribed burning and prescribed herbivory of grassland.

Letter A8 **Stanislaus County Environmental Review Committee**

Patrick Cavanah, Sr. Management Consultant

August 5, 2019

###### Comment A8-1

Thank you for the opportunity to review the above-referenced project.

The Stanislaus County Environmental Review Committee (ERC) has reviewed the subject project and has no comments at this time.

The ERC appreciates the opportunity to comment on this project.

###### Response A8-1

The commenter’s statement that ERC has no comments is noted. No further response is warranted.

Letter A9 **County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors**

Carole Groom, President

August 6, 2019

###### Comment A9-1

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors (“Board”) writes in support of the California Vegetation Treatment Program's (the “CalVTP”) draft Program Environmental Impact Report (“PEIR”), dated June 24, 2019. Through the San Mateo County Parks Department, the County of San Mateo (“County”) manages over 16,000 acres of parkland and open space; much of which qualifies as “treatable landscape” pursuant to the PEIR. As the County strives to take a more active management approach to land stewardship, in part because of the increasing effects of climate change, the PEIR will enable the County to more efficiently assess and implement critical fuel reduction and habitat restoration projects.

Using the treatment activities incorporated in the CalVTP, the County will also be able to reduce the threat of wildfire to its most vulnerable communities and improve overall ecosystem health. These treatment activities include the reduction of fuels within the wild land-urban interface, establishment of fuel breaks, and ecological restoration using manual, mechanical, and chemical treatment approaches. Further, while the County is working to reduce the amount of herbicide used in lieu of an integrated pest management approach to vegetation management, it acknowledges that due to the rapid rate of regrowth of non-native vegetation present in some parks, including eucalyptus trees, gorse, and broom, limited and select use of herbicides will be necessary.

###### Response A9-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A9-2

Equally important is the ability to more efficiently complete projects that significantly improve the ecological value of habitat in our parks and open spaces. Through the reduction of fuel loads in eligible areas, the County can promote a historic and natural disturbance regime, reduce competition for resources within the ecosystem, and in turn enhance the health of mature trees and vegetation. This will provide benefit to both the wildlife and the habitats they are dependent on.

###### Response A9-2

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP’s streamlining will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A9-3

While implementation of the analyzed program activities has been determined to create specified impacts, some of which are considered significant and unavoidable, the adverse impacts created by wildfire are far greater. As California has experienced, recent high intensity and catastrophic landscape-level fires have been the largest, most destructive, and deadliest wildfires on record in the state. These types of fires are destructive to habitat, have caused loss of life and property, and generate air quality levels that are hazardous to public health. The impacts from these types of wildfires far exceed those created by carefully organized and planned fuel reduction and restoration projects that are made possible through the CalVTP.

This Board appreciates the extensive work that has been dedicated to this effort. As the agency responsible for preserving San Mateo County's parkland and open space for future generations, the County is prepared to use the opportunities granted by the PEIR for the CalVTP in the most appropriate manner possible. Thank you for your consideration.

###### Response A9-3

The commenter’s comparison of the impacts of the proposed CalVTP’s to impacts of wildfire is noted. No further response is warranted.

Letter A10 **County of Tuolumne Board of Supervisors**

Karl Rodefer, Chairman

August 6, 2019

###### Comment A10-1

The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors is appreciative of efforts by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to streamline the CEQA process in order to increase fuel reduction and ecological restoration projects throughout the state. This Board is also supportive of the intended uses of the CalVTP Program EIR. In particular, we support the project-specific implementation of CEQA for later activities that are found to be “within the scope” of the CalVTP PEIR. This will help with needed ongoing fuel break maintenance within our communities.

Developing an implementation program such as the CalVTP Program EIR to increase prescribed burning, manual and mechanical vegetation treatment, prescribed grazing and herbicide use will help slow or prevent the spread of fire in the critical State Responsibility Areas. This type of model has been needed for many years and the environmental impacts appear to be generally less than significant, especially when comparing the environmental impacts of a large wildland fire.

###### Response A10-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A10-2

This Board requests the PEIR contain an analysis of the “No Action Alternative” as well, in order to adequately highlight the catastrophic carbon emissions and loses to carbon storage as well as all the other ecosystem damage that would occur on SRA land should the PEIR not be approved. The Rim Fire in 2013 emitted an estimated fifteen million metric tons of carbon, equivalent to three million cars and destroyed up to $72,389,913 worth of carbon storage value on private lands alone. A 2013 report from

Earth Economics assessed the catastrophic economic impacts the Rim Fire had to the totality of the ecosystem, including on SRA lands. A no action or diminished action alternative has potential quantifiable consequences that are critical in this analysis and important when considering environmental impacts to the vegetation treatments proposed in the CalVTP PEIR. Additionally, the impacts to water quality and quantity should be included in the analysis as there is a direct scientific correlation between heavy fuels, water quantity, catastrophic fire and water quality.

Tuolumne County is appreciative of this significant effort by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection and looks forward to a continued partnership to implement the PEIR with CAL FIRE for the health and safety of our citizens, our visitors and the natural resources we all value.

###### Response A10-2

The No Program Alternative is addressed in Section 6.2.1, “No Program Alternative,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. The analysis acknowledges that the adverse environmental effects of wildfire would be more likely to manifest under the No Program Alternative because fewer acres would be treated for wildfire prevention.

Letter A11 **Tuolumne Utilities District**

Edwin R. Pattison, General Manager

August 6, 2019

###### Comment A11-1

The Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) is the largest water and wastewater utility serving nearly 44,000 residents in the rural area of Tuolumne County in the Sierra foothills. The District, along with the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) through its Headwaters Framework (2015), applauds the efforts of Governor Newsom's Executive Order on developing a Water Resilience Portfolio. We share the common goal for substantially increasing proactive restoration efforts, as opposed to the current reactive mode that involves “chasing fires” that devastate communities and costing Californians lives, quality of life, water supply and reliability impacts, and many more. The efforts outlined in the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to increase fuel reduction efforts will decrease the high risk to a wildfire threat while coinciding with the Governor's statewide initiative to a Water Resilience Portfolio and ACWA's Headwaters Initiative (currently being updated).

Tuolumne County was recently listed as the number one County at risk by the California Department of Insurance's, Availability and Affordability of Coverage for Wildfire Loss in Residential Property Insurance in the Wild land-Urban Interface. The protection of the District's watershed and water supply infrastructure are of great concern due to the extreme risk of wildfire in our community. Efforts provided by the CalVTP Program will greatly reduce the impact of wildfire and benefit the overall community.

Developing an implementation program such as the CalVTP Program EIR to increase prescribed burning, manual and mechanical vegetation treatment, prescribed grazing and herbicide use will help slow or prevent the spread of fire in the critical State Responsibility Areas. This type of proactive model has been needed for many years and the environmental impacts appear to be generally less than significant, especially when comparing the environmental impacts of a large wildland fire.

Tuolumne Utilities District is appreciative of this significant effort by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to increase the health and safety throughout the state and Tuolumne County. We look forward to working with the many partners in California in reducing the risks of extreme fire hazards throughout the state, but especially in Tuolumne County.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me by telephone at (209) 532-5536 or by e-mail at epattison@tudwater.com.

###### Response A11-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A12 **Sweetwater Authority**

Ron R. Mosher, Director of Engineering

August 6, 2019

###### Comment A12-1

Thank you for providing Sweetwater Authority (Authority) with a notice of the draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP). The Authority provides the following comments:

**Standard Project Requirements and Mitigation Measures**

1. Standard Project Requirement “**SPR AD-4 Public Notifications for Prescribed Burning**” will require project proponents to send notification letters to the local county supervisor in advance of a prescribed fire. This requirement, however, does not identify what type of notification will be given to other major stakeholders, including local water districts and other utilities. It is recommended to include in the notification process any local water districts or utility companies that may own essential infrastructure within, near, or immediately downstream of the affected area.

###### Response A12-1

The project proponent will coordinate with any agencies that share jurisdiction over the land proposed for treatment or resource potentially affected for all treatments, including prescribed burns. See Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A12-2

2. Standard Project Requirement “**SPR GE0-4 Erosion Monitoring**” mentions that the project proponent will inspect treatment areas for the proper implementation of erosion controls. SPR GE0-4, however, limits these inspections to areas managed with mechanical and prescribed burning treatments. Erosion issues may result from any type of activity that removes vegetation and directly or indirectly disturbs soils, regardless of the method. To ensure erosion and sediment controls are in place and to prevent any potential impacts to water quality, it is recommended that erosion and sediment controls are implemented with all treatment methods, as necessary.

###### Response A12-2

Vegetation treatment activities that have the potential to expose bare soil or cause direct or indirect ground disturbance thereby making soil more susceptible to erosion include prescribed herbivory, prescribed burning, and mechanical treatments. Therefore, prescribed herbivory has been added to SPR GEO-4 in Section 2.7.6, “Geology, Soils, and Mineral Resource Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. Other vegetation treatments, including manual treatment and herbicide application, are not expected to cause large areas of bare soil or ground disturbance.

###### Comment A12-3

1. As currently written, Standard Procedure Requirement “SPR HYD-4 Identify and Protect Watercourse and Lake Protection Zones” would require the establishment of Watercourse and Lake Protection Zones (WLPZs), as described in the California Forest Practice Rules. While this measure aims to protect watercourses and water quality, it may fail to adequately protect drinking water sources, including surface water reservoirs. WLPZs appear to have been developed with the goal of protecting watercourses and lakes from commercial timber operations and not from vegetation treatment activities, as described in the CalVTP. It is unclear how the WLPZs will protect drinking water sources from prescribed burns, targeted herbicide applications, or any of the other proposed vegetation treatment methods.

The Authority, as a water agency, is concerned that source water reservoirs may be impacted by nutrient and organic matter load increases, resulting from capturing runoff from areas that are subject to prescribed fires. Captured runoff with high concentrations of nutrients and organic matter may result in (1) an increase of algae bloom frequencies at lakes and reservoirs, (2) the need for treating such algae blooms, and (3) an overall increase to the cost of treating reservoirs and drinking water, among other unintended consequences such as taste and odor and cyanotoxin production. Herbicide treatments and other CalVTP treatment methods may also result in an increase of other pollutants of concern at reservoirs. A well-known state program that various water districts use to conduct drinking water source analyses is California’s Drinking Water Source Assessment Program (DWSAP). Although local water districts may modify it as they see fit, DWSAP has guidance for assessing impacts to drinking water sources from potentially contaminating activities (PCAs) within the watershed, including how to determine appropriate protection zones for drinking water reservoirs and how to conduct vulnerability analysis for both surface water and groundwater resources.

To avoid potential conflicts with local water districts and their source water protection programs, it is recommended to review DWSAP and revise SPR HYD-4 to incorporate DWSAP standards or similar protective measures. At a minimum, the CalVTP should incorporate a mitigation measure or standard project requirement that requires coordination between project proponents and applicable water districts before vegetation treatment activities take place to ensure drinking water sources will be fully protected.

The Authority appreciates the effort that the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is currently undertaking during the development of the CalVTP. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Environmental Project Manager, Israel Marquez at imarquez@sweetwater.org, or (619) 409-6759.

###### Response A12-3

As described under Impact HYD-1 in Section 3.11.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, WLPZs for streams or water bodies used for domestic water supply would range from 75 to 150 feet. Unburned streamside buffers act as a sediment sink to protect water sources from runoff from prescribed burns. In addition, the SPRs included in the CalVTP align with the fire fuel management practices proposed by the State Water Resources Control Board for protection of surface waters (SWRCB 2019). These practices include avoiding high-intensity fires, timing prescribed burns to achieve desired results, and using agency-qualified personnel (SPR AQ-3); protecting sensitive areas (SPR HYD-4); locating fire lines to minimize accelerated erosion (SPR GEO-7); and stabilizing disturbed areas and implementing runoff controls (SPR GEO-4 and SPR GEO-5). Potential impacts on water quality from the proposed use of herbicides are addressed in Impact HYD-4. As described, the CalVTP does not include aerial application of herbicides, which can result in herbicide drift and misapplication. Additionally, SPR HYD-5 prohibits spray application of herbicides when wind speeds are greater than 7 mph and restricts herbicide use within 50 feet of surface waters to herbicides labeled for use in aquatic environments. Furthermore, SPR BIO-5 requires that herbicides be applied by hand within riparian areas. These protections, coupled with compliance with the requirements of the herbicide label, would control the risk of source water contamination due to herbicide application. The risk to surface water and groundwater resources from herbicide spill or accidental misapplication would be controlled through SPR HAZ-5, which requires a Spill Prevention and Response Plan and on-site spill kit for all projects, and SPR HAZ-7, which requires washing of herbicide application equipment and personnel in a manner that protects water resources. As described above, the CalVTP has incorporated numerous SPRs to protect surface water quality and prevent adverse effects from prescribed burning and the use of herbicides. Refer to Master Response 9 for additional information on water quality protection during herbicide application under the CalVTP.

Letter A13 **County of Santa Barbara Executive Office**

Dennis Bozanich, Deputy Executive Officer

August 7, 2019

###### Comment A13-1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Availability of Draft Program Environmental Impact Report Regarding a Proposed Statewide Vegetation Treatment Program. At this time, the County submits comments from the Planning and Development Department and Fire Department.

If you should have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office directly, Lisa Plowman, Director, Planning and Development Department, at (805) 568-2086, or Rob Hazard, Division Chief and Fire Marshal, Fire Department, at (805) 681-5554.

###### Response A13-1

The comment summarizes detailed comments provided elsewhere in the comment letter. See responses to comments A13-2 through A13-15.

###### Comment A13-2

The County of Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department has reviewed the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) and appreciates the opportunity to provide the comments listed below.

**Implementation Framework**

1. Under Section 2.6, when identifying who would be able to use the PEIR, the CalVTP should further clarify its applicability to “later activities that would be funded and/or implemented by private landowners, Fire Safe Councils, or non-governmental organizations.” The draft PEIR (page 2-29) states that the “implementing entity would enter into a contract or agreement with CAL FIRE to implement the CalVTP activity.” Under these circumstances, which entity would be the lead agency? Which entity would be obtaining permits for the activities?

###### Response A13-2

Refer to Master Response 4 and response to comment O28-22 regarding lead agency and responsible agency roles under CEQA as it pertains to the CalVTP.

###### Comment A13-3

2. Section 2.8 of the PEIR (Potential Permits and Approvals Required) should state that activities undertaken by entities other than CAL FIRE and State and local agencies may be subject to local agency permits prior to conducting any vegetation treatment projects, depending on the scope of the activities and local agency ordinance requirements. For example, potential future vegetation treatment project proponents, other than CAL FIRE and other Santa Barbara County Departments, should be aware that it may be necessary to obtain a land use entitlement from the County Planning and Development Department in order to conduct vegetation treatments that rely on the PEIR for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

###### Response A13-3

As requested by the commenter, it has been noted in Section 2.8, “Potential Permits and Approvals Required,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR that other local agency permits may be required for activities undertaken by entities other than CAL FIRE and state and local agencies.

###### Comment A13-4

3. The PEIR should further clarify the party responsible for concluding that a future vegetation treatment project is consistent with the PEIR and that no further environmental review will be necessary. In addition, it is not clear who will file the Notice of Determination and how the public will be notified of the subsequent determination regarding the environmental review.

###### Response A13-4

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for PSA implementation and approval. Refer to Master Response 5 regarding public review of later treatment projects pursuant to CEQA and Master Response 6 regarding public accessibility of information on proposed and approved projects.

###### Comment A13-5

**Comprehensive Plan Consistency**

4. County departments (e.g., County Fire Department) that could act as a project proponent would need to ensure their vegetation treatment project is consistent with the County's Comprehensive Plan (General Plan) and applicable community plan policies pursuant to California Government Code Section 65402. These policies may require protection of specific resources and dictate mitigation requirements for the loss or degradation of these resources (e.g., sensitive natural communities) related to vegetation treatment projects. For instance, certain coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation alliances are designated as Environmentally Sensitive Habitats in the Eastern Goleta Valley Community Plan, and Policy ECO-EGV-2.5 requires restoration at a 2: 1 mitigation ratio for the loss of biological resources. Policies also exist that discourage the removal of protected trees and provide offset ratios for their replacement within certain community plan areas. These policies would also apply to non-governmental project proponents. The Final PEIR should state that there may be local environmental requirements, such as those mentioned above, with which future vegetation treatment activities would need to comply.

###### Response A13-5

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A13-6

**Type Conversion**

5. The PEIR states that it is beyond its scope to define type conversion for the purposes of SB 1260 compliance which prohibits type conversion in chaparral or sage scrub vegetation communities. The PEIR further states that the definition for the purposes of SB 1260 compliance may be broader than the ecological definition provided in the PEIR and take into account geographic context, and that a project proponent may use the ecological definition to substantiate how type conversion is defined within the context of a project. Requiring each project proponent to determine the criteria by which type conversion is determined could result in inconsistent application of what is intended to be a uniform standard that provides protection to chaparral and coastal sage scrub habitats. It may not be appropriate to provide a general definition for all projects statewide. However, the PEIR should provide guidance on how to evaluate the factors that could result in type conversion. This should include the geographic extent of habitat modification and any other criteria that could contribute to type conversion based on literature and existing case studies. Such guidance could point to existing information within the PEIR, which states on page 3.6-183, “Shortened fire return interval has been identified as a primary driver of type conversion from chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation types to vegetation types dominated by nonnative herbaceous vegetation in Southern California (Syphard et al. 2019).” By providing additional information and guidance, future vegetation treatment projects may benefit from better design and implementation and project proponents and decision makers would have additional substantial evidence on which to base their project findings.

###### Response A13-6

Refer to Master Response 3 regarding treatments in chaparral and coastal sage scrub and type conversion.

###### Comment A13-7

6. Preventing type conversion in coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitats can be inherently challenging because of the difficulty in predicting confounding factors such as multi-year drought and invasion of invasive plants. Some fuel treatment projects will be ongoing or multi-year treatments in coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation alliances. The PEIR incorporates a monitoring and adaptive management framework; however, there is no requirement to monitor and adapt treatments or restore areas to ensure type conversion does not occur for treatment projects that require ongoing or periodic maintenance. Type conversion is avoided if habitat function is maintained, but there is no specific requirement within Standard Project Requirement BIO-5 (Avoid Environmental Effects of Type Conversion and Maintain Habitat Function in Chaparral and Coastal Sage Scrub) to monitor treatments to ensure type conversion is avoided and to adapt treatment practices to prevent it. Planning and Development recommends requiring increased monitoring and adaptive management for treatments that require periodic maintenance in coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation communities to allow project proponents to adjust treatment practices based on the conditions at that time if monitoring suggests type conversion could occur.

###### Response A13-7

Refer to Master Response 8 regarding monitoring and adaptive management.

###### Comment A13-8

**Administrative Standard Project Requirements**

7. The PEIR should state explicitly that for fuel treatments that require periodic maintenance in order to maintain desired conditions, the administrative Standard Project Requirements (SPR) should be applied prior to initial treatment and before any ongoing maintenance treatments in order to adequately avoid or mitigate impacts. For instance, SPRs that require sensitive wildlife surveys would likely be necessary prior to initiating maintenance activities on vegetation to adequately mitigate potential impacts to these resources.

###### Response A13-8

Refer to Master Response 2 regarding the applicability of SPRs and mitigation measures to maintenance. Additionally, the MMRP that must accompany a PSA will identify the timing for implementation of each applicable SPR or mitigation measure, as described in Master Response 8.

###### Comment A13-9

**Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resources**

8. The draft PEIR analysis and Impact CUL-3 identify 12 Native American tribes that were contacted regarding preparation of the CalVTP PEIR, identify four tribes that requested consultation, and one tribe (San Manuel Band of Mission Indians) with which consultation is ongoing. The impact analysis associated with Impact CUL-3 and Mitigation Measure CUL-3 appear to conclude that upon completion of consultation with the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and incorporation of any mitigation if tribal cultural resources are identified by this tribe, that the impact will be mitigated. However, according to Table 3.5-1 of the draft PEIR, several tribes local to Santa Barbara County were not contacted. These tribes, including the federally recognized Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, and the Barbaraeno/Ventureno Band of Mission Indians and the Coastal Band of Chumash Nation, have notified the Native American Heritage Commission requesting notification of project environmental review. It is likely that prehistoric archaeological rock art as we11 as other prehistoric sites in Santa Barbara County, which may also qualify as tribal cultural resources, are located within the treatable landscape. Contact with tribes (and possibly others) early in the environmental review process is important to determine whether future contact and mitigation requirements would apply to fuel treatment activities. Please ensure these tribes have been contacted regarding the Draft PEIR for the CalVTP project, pursuant to PRC Section 21080.3.1.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft PEIR. If you have any questions or require further information, please contact me at (805) 568-2086 or Mr. Dan Klemann at (805) 568-2072.

###### Response A13-9

Pursuant to PRC Section 21080.3.1, the lead agency shall begin consultation with a California Native American tribe that is traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the proposed project if the tribe requested to the lead agency, in writing, to be informed by the lead agency through formal notification of proposed projects in the geographic area. As discussed under “Tribal Consultation” in Section 3.5.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the Board sent letters on February 9, 2019, notifying 12 Native American tribes that preparation of the PEIR has begun, as required by PRC Section 21080.3.1. These tribes had submitted requests to the Board to be notified of projects. No other tribes have submitted requests to the Board to be notified of projects.

###### Comment A13-10

Santa Barbara County Fire Department (SBC Fire) has reviewed the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP). SBC Fire supports the goals of the CalVTP and agrees that it could be an effective tool to address fuels management both state-wide and in Santa Barbara County. SBC Fire has an active fuels management program that reflects the fuel treatment types outlined in the Draft CalVTP- (1) WUI treatments, (2) strategic fuel breaks, and (3) prescribed fire. SBC Fire staff utilize the aging Vegetation Management Program (VMP) PEIR for prescribed fire projects, and individual CEQA analysis for WUI and fuel break treatments. The CalVTP PEIR would improve our ability to provide consistent, accurate, and quality CEQA review for future projects.

Santa Barbara County has experienced an intense decade of wildland fire. Past fuels management activities have proven instrumental in limiting structure loss, increasing firefighter and public safety, and improving fire control objectives. Community defensible space (WUI) treatments in the Santa Barbara front country foothills were utilized during the 2018 Thomas Fire to successfully protect thousands of structures. Strategic fuel breaks have been used to support critical backfiring operations on multiple incidents including the 2007 Zaca Fire, the 2008 Gap Fire, The 2009 La Brea Fire, the 2017 Whittier Fire, and the 2018 Thomas Fire. Additionally, recent fires have demonstrated the value of vegetation age-class reduction, both from prescribed fire and wildfire, in providing large landscape-scale areas that limit fire spread. Chaparral fuel beds in Santa Barbara County have shown remarkable fire resistance in sub 20 year age class. Given the above described wildfire impacts SBC Fire supports the expanded scope of the Draft CalVTP PEIR.

###### Response A13-10

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A13-11

An important component of vegetation management is the benefit to life safety, both to the public and to firefighters engaged in fire suppression activities. Properly designed fuel treatments can significantly reduce fireline intensities creating much safer conditions for firefighters. This holds true for all three types of fuel treatments described in the Draft CalVTP. Fuel break treatments when aligned with indirect fire suppression strategies can greatly enhance both safety and efficacy of backfiring operations. Prescribed fire treatments can help reduce fireline intensities in a large area, increasing the safety of firefighters engaged in initial attack, and WUI treatments provide for increased safety for engine crews engaged in structure protection. All these fuel treatments have the potential to greatly increase the safety of the public during evacuation and/or forced shelter-in place activities. The Draft CalVTP should emphasize the benefit to firefighter and public safety when describing the need, purpose, and benefits of the program.

###### Response A13-11

The safety benefit of implementing vegetation treatments is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A13-12

Santa Barbara County represents the transition from Southern to Central California, and as such contains unique vegetation alliances. Our local weather patterns are also distinct. To adequately support fuel treatment strategies specific to our unique area the Draft CalVTP should address these local conditions, particularly the impact of previous fires limiting subsequent fire spread.

###### Response A13-12

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding completion of PSAs to address project-level conditions.

###### Comment A13-13

Prescribed fire in sage and grass/oak woodland vegetation alliances should be included in the scope of the proposed PEIR, as well as the impact of traditional herbivory, particularly when combined with range improvement prescribed fire.

###### Response A13-13

Prescribed burning may be used in grass-, shrub-, or tree-dominated fuel types. The likelihood of implementing prescribed burning by fuel type is presented in Table 2-4 in Section 2.5.1, “Description of Treatment Types,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. The impact of prescribed herbivory is discussed throughout the PEIR.

###### Comment A13-14

The efficacy of our local strategic fuel breaks, demonstrated in recent large fires, should also be incorporated into the EIR.

###### Response A13-14

Refer to Master Response 1 regarding the effectiveness of the CalVTP in reducing wildfire risk.

###### Comment A13-15

The Draft CalVTP describes the implementation framework in rather broad terms. It would be beneficial to provide additional clarity for the Contract Counties (LA, Ventura, Santa Barbara, Kern, Marin, Orange) regarding the Contract County Fire Department interactions with local governing bodies such as County Board of Supervisors, Fire District Boards, etc. when the Fire Department is the Project Proponent for projects within both the SRA and/or the LRA. Many county General Plans address and regulate activities that have the potential to impact sensitive habitat or vegetative alliances. The Standard Project Requirements should provide a comprehensive pathway to ensure that projects remain consistent with local plans.

Santa Barbara County Fire supports the Board of Forestry in the continued effort to craft a comprehensive plan to reduce wildland fire risk statewide. The Draft CalVTP PEIR as outlined in the NOA will be a powerful tool for local agencies engaged in fuel reduction activities.

As always, if you have any questions or require further information, please call 681- 5568 or 681-5523.

###### Response A13-15

Master Response 4 describes the process that would be implemented by a project proponent for the development, environmental review, and approval of vegetation treatment projects under the CalVTP. Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

Letter A14 **California Department of Transportation, Division of Transportation Planning**

Christian Bushong, LD-IGR Branch Chief

August 7, 2019

###### Comment A14-1

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the review of the Draft- Program Environmental Impact Report (DPEIR) for the proposed Statewide Vegetation Treatment Program. The mission of Caltrans is to provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability. The Local Development­Intergovernmental Review (LD-IGR) Program reviews land use projects and plans to ensure consistency with our mission and state planning priorities.

The project proposes vegetation treatments to reduce wildfire risks and avoid or diminish the harmful effects of wildfire on the people, property, and natural resources in the State of California. The project has a statewide scope. As owner and operator of the State Highway System (SHS), Caltrans is a responsible agency and has the following comments:

###### Response A14-1

The discussion of Caltrans’s mission and role as a responsible agency is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A14-2

1. Caltrans has concerns related to potential limited visibility on state highways from prescribed treatment burn smoke. Please review Caltrans Highway Design Manual (HDM) Section 100 for sight distance and the Transportation Management Plan (TMP) logistics (e.g. time of day, stop control, equipment and worker staging areas, and other fire treatment related activities).

For more information on sight distance and traffic management refer to the following website: [https ://dot.ca.gov /programs/design/manual-highway-design-manual-hdm](file:///%5C%5Csierra.ascent.local%5Cshares%5CProjects%5C2018%5C18010126.01%20-%20CAL%20FIRE%20-%20Veg%20Treatment%20Program%20PEIR%5C4_Deliverables%20in%20progress%5C5-Admin%20Final%20PEIR%5C04_%20To%20WP%5Ctemplates%5Chttps%20%3A%5Cdot.ca.gov%20%5Cprograms%5Cdesign%5Cmanual-highway-design-manual-hdm)

###### Response A14-2

As discussed under SPR TRAN-1 in Section 2.7.12, “Transportation Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the project proponent will work with the agency(ies) with jurisdiction over affected roadways to determine whether a TMP is needed prior to initiating vegetation treatment activities. A TMP will be needed if traffic generated by the project would result in obstructions, hazards, or delays exceeding applicable jurisdictional standards along access routes for individual vegetation treatments. If the TMP identifies impacts on transportation facilities outside of the jurisdiction of the project proponent, the TMP will be submitted to the agency with jurisdiction over the affected roadways prior to commencement of vegetation treatment projects. Direct smoke impacts on roadway visibility and indirect impacts related to driver distraction will be considered during the planning phase of burning operations. Smoke impacts and smoke management practices specific to traffic operations during prescribed fire operations will be identified and addressed within the TMP. The TMP will include measures to monitor smoke dispersion onto public roadways, and traffic control operations will be initiated if burning operations could affect traffic safety along any roadways.

Any prescribed burns with the potential to affect roadways under Caltrans’s jurisdiction will be coordinated with Caltrans prior to initiation of the burn.

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A14-3

2. Caltrans performs fire hazard control activities to roadside grasses to reduce fire risk. Additional fuels treatment is needed to address all levels of fire fuels (i.e., thinning of shrubs and trees), which includes embankment protection and potential ditch debris removal. Caltrans desires collaboration with Cal Fire to identify and partner on projects within high severity fire risk zones along highways. Collaboration will help the effort of creating a clear recovery zone area and SHS defensible space in the event of a naturally occurring fire or other hazard.

###### Response A14-3

The Board acknowledges the commenter’s desire to collaborate with CAL FIRE. Through statewide coordination efforts like the Tree Mortality Task Force, Forest Management Task, the current 45 Day Report that identifies 35 priority projects throughout the State and the Camp Fire recovery efforts, CAL FIRE has been partnering with Caltrans on several programs. CAL FIRE values its agency partnerships and will continue to seek opportunities to collaborate with other agencies to increase the pace and scale of treatments to reduce wildfire risk. Refer also to Master Response 7 regarding interagency coordination for projects implemented under the CalVTP.

###### Comment A14-4

3. Coordination with federal vegetation treatment plans for federal lands adjacent to the state Right-of-Way (R/W) is recommended.

###### Response A14-4

Refer to response to comment O16-3 regarding CAL FIRE’s coordination with federal landowners and land managers for projects adjacent to federal land.

###### Comment A14-5

4. Caltrans requests Cal Fire's consultation with District Landscape Architect staff regarding tree removal or trimming within a State Scenic Highway Corridor.

###### Response A14-5

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding interagency coordination for projects implemented under the CalVTP.

###### Comment A14-6

5. Please coordinate further with Caltrans' Traffic Operations and Maintenance for any activity that may occur in proximity or on Caltrans facilities.

a. If Cal Fire operations require any staging or activities on Caltrans facilities, the applicant must submit a traffic handling plan in addition to traffic management plans for further review during any encroachment permit process.

###### Response A14-6

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding interagency coordination for projects implemented under the CalVTP.

###### Comment A14-7

b. Vegetation removal may destabilize the surface soil layer. Make certain that soils remain stable to prevent unnatural erosion and debris from occurring.

###### Response A14-7

As discussed under Impact GEO-1, implementation of SPRs GEO-1 through GEO-8, AQ-3, AQ-4, HYD-3, and HYD-4 would avoid and minimize any substantial soil erosion or loss of topsoil during treatment activities. Refer to Section 3.7.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A14-8

c. During operations, please limit the amount of debris that may fall into Caltrans facilities. Please ensure that Caltrans culverts and drainage remain free from any debris and unobstructed.

###### Response A14-8

As discussed in Section 2.7.6, “Geology, Soils, and Mineral Resource Standard Project Requirements,” and Section 2.7.9, “Hydrology and Water Quality Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, SPRs GEO-1, GEO-3, GEO-4, GEO-7, HYD-1, HYD-3, HYD-4, and HYD-6 would protect waterways and drainages from potential erosion and debris from vegetation treatments. Implementation of these SPRs would avoid or minimize potential impacts on waterways.

###### Comment A14-9

6. Any work performed within Caltrans' R/W will require discretionary review and approval by Caltrans and an encroachment permit will be required for any work within Caltrans' R/W prior to activity. As part of the encroachment permit process, the applicant must provide an approved final environmental document including California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) determination addressing any environmental impacts within the Caltrans' R/W, and any corresponding technical studies. For specific details for Encroachment Permits procedure, please refer to the Caltrans's Encroachment Permits Manual at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/traffops/developserv/permits/>
For Caltrans District Encroachment Permits Contacts please refer to the following link: [https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep/district­contacts](https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep/district%C2%ADcontacts)

###### Response A14-9

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding interagency coordination for projects implemented under the CalVTP, including acquisition of permits. Section 2.8, “Potential Permits and Approvals Required,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR lists an encroachment permit from Caltrans among the potential permits and approvals needed to implement treatments under the CalVTP. The commenter may also act as a project proponent using the CalVTP PEIR for CEQA coverage of its vegetation treatment projects consistent with the CalVTP.

###### Comment A14-10

7. For all vegetative removal areas, please consider cultural resources and Native American areas of special concern. Please coordinate with Caltrans' District Native American Liaisons.

###### Response A14-10

Refer to Section 3.5, “Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resources,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR for a discussion of the potential for CalVTP to affect cultural resources and tribal cultural resources. Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination.

###### Comment A14-11

8. As an agency with fee title and easement holdings over a considerable extent of land in the vegetation treatment project area, Caltrans is responsible for compliance with Public Resource Code (PRC) 5024 (which is intended to require that State Owned Historic Resources are protected and managed). Impacts to State Owned Historic Resources through the Cal VTP within Caltrans' R/W may require assessment and mitigation. The Cal VTP should be implemented in such a manner as to avoid impacts to State Owned Historic Resources.

###### Response A14-11

As discussed under Impact CUL-1 in Section 3.15.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, implementation of SPRs CUL-1, CUL-6, and CUL-7 would avoid any substantial adverse change to any built historical resources.

###### Comment A14-12

9. The California Vegetation Treatment Program (Cal VTP) includes three general types of treatments: wildland-urban interface (WUI) fuel reduction; fuel breaks that actively support fire control activities; and ecological restoration projects to restore ecosystem processes, conditions and resiliency to reflect historic vegetative composition, structure and habitat value. Due to the linear nature of the State Highway System (SHS) in every county in California, Caltrans has a strategic opportunity to participate in wildfire risk reduction to the state's people and natural resources under the coverage provided by Cal VTP. Caltrans Maintenance Forest Management Program has identified three primary land management objectives for vegetation treatment types covered by Cal VTP that may need further discussion in the document. 1) to reduce wildfire ignitions that originate from vehicles on the state highway system right of way; 2) to reduce emergency expenditures necessary to restore the highway infrastructure after wildfire; and 3) to restore vegetation in burn areas to re-establish resilience where debris flow, slope instability and flooding have increased and threaten the safety of highway users.

###### Response A14-12

The treatment types and activities described in Chapter 2, “Program Description,” of Volume II of this Final PEIR would be implemented in the treatable landscape to reduce wildfire risk; this could include projects consistent with the Caltrans Maintenance Forest Program to reduce wildfire risk from ignitions that originate from vehicles on the state highway system right-of-way. An effect of reduced wildfire would be a reduction in emergency expenditures necessary to restore the highway infrastructure after wildfire. Restoration of areas burned in a wildfire is not within the scope of the PEIR. Implementation of SPRs AQ-3, GEO-3, and GEO-4 would avoid and minimize erosion-related to treatments, including prescribed burning.

###### Comment A14-13

10. Defensible space zone along highways is envisioned as a band of vegetation treatment beyond the existing Clear Recovery Zone (CRZ) along all miles of state highways. CRZs are typically a clear zone with no vegetation other than ground cover. Treatable acres along roadways should include a discussion of CRZs in the Cal VTP. For more information concerning CRZ please refer to the Caltrans HDM Chapter 300 at the following website: [https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/manual-highway­design-manual-hdm](https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/manual-highway%C2%ADdesign-manual-hdm)

11. Land management objectives for defensible space to reduce wildfire risk and increase safety should be determined by a collaborative effort with Caltrans, Cal Fire, local agencies, and stakeholders in developing effective vegetation treatment baseline condition and alternatives once a baseline condition is established.

###### Response A14-13

The information provided related to Clear Recovery Zones is noted. Vegetation treatments under the CalVTP may be implemented along roadways to achieve these objectives. Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A14-14

12. Please clarify if Cal Fire's existing Chaparral Management Program is combined with the existing Vegetation Management Program (VMP), and the extent of coverage these programs have under the Cal VTP.

###### Response A14-14

As discussed under “Vegetation Management Program” in Section 1.4.1, “Existing CAL FIRE Programs,” portions of the Chaparral Management Program (CMP) have since become the VMP, which is guided by the statutes created in SB 1704. The VMP and the proposed CalVTP are supported by separate PEIRs. The CMP employs multiple mechanisms to treat vegetation, similar to the proposed CalVTP (e.g., prescribed fire, mechanical, manual). However, the CMP does not include the use of herbicides or mechanical mastication or treatments on forested lands, which are included in the proposed CalVTP. The treatable landscape of the proposed CalVTP is larger than and encompasses the CMP. The VMP and CMP will continue to be in effect. There may be specific treatment locations within California that may benefit from either the CMP, VMP, or the CalVTP, depending on the specific landowner objectives. Upon certification, this CalVTP PEIR would support and supplement CAL FIRE’s existing CMP, so the acres treated through the existing CMP are encompassed in the projected treated acres of the CalVTP.

###### Comment A14-15

13. As noted in Section 3.12, "Land Use and Planning, Population and Housing," ... achieving the identified treatment acreage target under the Cal VTP within the vegetated roadside of the R/W owned and maintained by the SHS would require dedicated vegetation treatment crews within Caltrans Maintenance to maintain the fuels reduction risk reduction investment on a five-year maintenance cycle. Please discuss how the Cal VTP would support maintenance activities.

###### Response A14-15

Refer to Master Response 2 regarding treatment maintenance.

###### Comment A14-16

14. As noted in Table 3.12-3 in Section 3.12, “Land Use and Planning, Population and Housing,” the majority of counties in California, including those in the 20.3 M acres of treatable landscape for the proposed Cal VTP, are expected to experience population growth, and associated expansion of development, by 2060 (DOF 2018). The expansion of development will result in increased demand for multimodal transportation facilities to serve the additional population. Please add discussion to the Cal VTP to affect that treatable landscape priorities should be considered higher where land-use pressure and transportation investment demand overlap.

###### Response A14-16

The comment is directed toward implementation of the CalVTP and does not address the content, analysis, or conclusions in the Draft PEIR. Therefore, no further response is warranted.

###### Comment A14-17

15. As noted in Section 4.4.14, “Transportation,” the geographic scope of the cumulative transportation analysis covers the entirety of the treatable landscape and the surrounding roadway network used to access individual vegetation treatment sites. The SHS is comprised of 51,900 lane miles of roadway and approximately 350,000 acres. Of the 350,000 acres, approximately 98,000 is managed as pavement and 252,000 acres is considered roadside.

A highly variable roadside vegetation condition exists, generally divided into “landscaped” and “non-landscaped” roadsides. Maintenance of landscaped roadside, (acres without planting or irrigation system design improvements), occurs on approximately 31,400 acres. Close to 210,000 acres are potentially treatable vegetation acreage (non-landscaped acres) along the state highway. Assessment of the existing treatable acres and condition as a “natural asset” is not discussed as an activity under Cal VTP but would be essential to establish a baseline condition (Refer to item 11: Land Management Objectives).

Please continue to keep us informed of this project and any future developments that could potentially impact State transportation facilities. If you have any questions or need to contact us, please do not hesitate to contact Lloyd Light (916)651-8204. Email Lloyd.Light@dot.ca.gov

###### Response A14-17

The environmental setting related to transportation infrastructure throughout the treatable landscape is described in Section 3.15.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. The commenter’s offer to collaborate with the Board is noted.

Letter A15 **Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority**

Jennifer Hooper, Planning Technician

August 7, 2019

###### Comment A15-1

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority) has reviewed the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) and confirms our intent to participate as a responsible agency under the CalVTP. The Authority is also in support of the proposed program over the alternatives outlined in the PEIR.

As part of the CalVTP, the process outlined in Section 2.6 Implementation Framework, lays the groundwork for responsible agencies to more efficiently implement projects that will improve ecosystem function and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. The streamlining provided through the CalVTP PEIR will save the Authority time and cost in implementing projects.

The Authority appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft PEIR for the CalVTP. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me at jhooper@openspaceauthority.org or (408) 224-7476.

###### Response A15-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A16 **Los Angeles Department of Water and Power**

Brian Gonzalez, Environmental Planning and Assessment

August 8, 2019

###### Comment A16-1

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) appreciates the opportunity to review the draft California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). After reviewing the PEIR, the LADWP has determined the PEIR may have impacts to Power System infrastructure and respectfully submits the following comments:

1. Board of Forestry and Fire Protection referenced herein shall pertain to its employees, agents, consultants, contractors, officers, patrons, or invitees of Board of Forestry and Fire Protection; or any other Board of Forestry and Fire Protection affiliated entities.

###### Response A16-1

The commenter’s statement that comments apply to all Board affiliates is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A16-2

2. Board of Forestry and Fire Protection shall acknowledge that the LADWP is an integral component of the transmission line system which provides electric power to the City of Los Angeles and other local communities. Their use is under the jurisdiction of the Federal North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC). Safety and protection of critical facilities are primary factors used to evaluate secondary land use proposals. The rights of way serve as platforms for access, construction, maintenance, facility expansion, and emergency operations. Therefore, the proposed use may from time to time be subject to temporary disruption caused by such operations.

###### Response A16-2

The Board acknowledges that the LADWP is an integral component of the transmission line system that provides electric power to the City of Los Angeles and other local communities. The comment does not raise any issues with the Draft PEIR; no further response is warranted.

###### Comment A16-3

3. The following locations will potentially be impacted by the California Vegetation Treatment Program:

* Mojave Desert Ecological Section
* Mono Ecological Section
* Sierra Nevada Ecological Section
* Southeast Great Basin Ecological Section
* Southern California Coast Ecological Section
* Southern California Mountain and Valley Ecological Section

###### Response A16-3

The commenter’s statement of ecological sections potentially affected by the CalVTP is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A16-4

4. Prescribed burning will not be allowed on the TLRW as no fires and burning of materials are allowed on LADWP’s TLRW. The burning of materials on the TLRWs may lead to power outages in the transmission system and impact the system reliability of the transmission grid.

###### Response A16-4

As explained in Master Response 7, the project proponent will coordinate with agencies that share jurisdiction over the land proposed for treatment or resources potentially affected, including designing the treatment to be consistent with applicable state and local regulations (as required by SPR AD-3) and obtaining any applicable permits or authorizations prior to implementing the treatment.

###### Comment A16-5

5. Mechanical Treatment, Manual Treatment, and Prescribed Herbivory must be reviewed and approved by the LADWP Right-of-Way Engineering Group before being implemented on LADWP’s TLRW.

###### Response A16-5

Refer to response to comment A16-4 regarding agency coordination.

###### Comment A16-6

6. Herbicides within LADWP’s TLRW will require LADWP’s Environmental Group’s review & approval.

###### Response A16-6

Refer to response to comment A16-4 regarding agency coordination.

###### Comment A16-7

7. This comment letter shall in no way be construed as an approval of any project.

LADWP’s formal response letter that includes the comments above has been sent via US Mail.

###### Response A16-7

The Board acknowledges that the comment letter is not approval of any project. No further response is warranted.

Letter A17 **State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards**

Karen L. Mogus, Deputy Director, Division of Water Quality

August 8, 2019

###### Comment A17-1

The State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards (collectively the Water Boards) appreciate the opportunity to review the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection’s Draft Program Environmental Impact Report Regarding a Proposed Statewide Vegetation Treatment Program (Draft PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP).

The proposed CalVTP directs implementation of vegetation treatments to serve as one component of the state’s range of actions to reduce the risk of loss of lives and property, reduce fire suppression costs, and protect natural resources from wildfire. The CalVTP seeks to substantially increase the pace and scale of vegetation treatments to contribute to achieving a statewide total of at least 500,000 acres per year on non‐federal lands, consistent with the former Governor’s EO B‐52‐18, which results in a CalVTP target up to 250,000 acres per year after considering other types and areas of vegetation treatments.

The Water Boards understand the important need to manage forests and other natural and working lands to mitigate wildfire hazards to ultimately reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire and its impacts to water quality and the environment. The Water Boards support the goals of the CalVTP and urge the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to adopt the Draft PEIR.

###### Response A17-1

The summary of CalVTP is noted. The commenter’s expression of support for the CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A17-2

In the interest of providing additional clarity to the proposed requirements described in the Draft PEIR, the Water Boards suggests that all relevant sections of the CalVTP listing Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) and related mitigation measures should be revised to explicitly state that:

1. Project implementers must also conduct proposed vegetation treatments in conformance with appropriate RWQCB timber, vegetation and land disturbance related Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) and/or related Conditional Waivers of Waste Discharge Requirements (Waivers), and appropriate Basin Plan Prohibitions. Where these regulatory requirements differ, the most restrictive applies.

###### Response A17-2

SPR HYD-1 has been revised to include the suggested clarifying text. Refer to Section 2.7.9, “Hydrology and Water Quality Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A17-3

2. Use of herbicide should be prohibited within the riparian buffers of any classified watercourse or waterbody – i.e. 150 foot buffers for Class I (fish bearing and domestic water sources), 100 ft for Class II (non‐fish bearing streams that support aquatic habitat, seeps, springs, ponds and wetlands), and 50 foot for Class III watercourses.

###### Response A17-3

The proposed CalVTP includes the potential use of herbicides to control terrestrial plants that create a wildfire hazard. The proposed program does not include the application of herbicides to surface waters. As described in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, herbicides may be applied to targeted species in various ways. Under the CalVTP, herbicides would be applied only on the ground from equipment on vehicles (including all-terrain vehicles and tractors) or by manual application devices. At the direction of the licensed PCA, herbicides may be applied to green leaves with a backpack hand-applicator or spray bottle, wick (painted or wiped on), or hand wand (sprayed on), or would be hand applied as pellets to the ground surface. Herbicides may also be applied to trees around the circumference of the trunk on the intact bark (basal bark), to cuts in the trunk or stem (frill, or “hack and squirt”), to cut stems and stumps (paint on cut stumps), or injected into the inner bark with a hypo-hatchet. The proposed CalVTP intentionally limits herbicide application methods to protect sensitive resources and ensure that only the targeted species are affected.

In addition, SPR HYD-5 prohibits spray application of herbicides when wind speeds are greater than 7 mph and restricts herbicide use within 50 feet of surface waters to herbicides labeled for use in aquatic environments. Furthermore, SPR BIO-4 requires that herbicides must be approved for use in aquatic environments and be applied by hand within riparian areas only during low-flow periods or when seasonal streams are dry. Implementation of these SPRs and compliance with regulatory requirements would maintain impacts on water quality from herbicide use under the CalVTP at less than significant (refer to Impact HYD-4 in Section 3.11.3 in Volume II of this Final PEIR).

To provide clarity, the relevant water quality protections in SPR BIO-4 have been added to SPR HYD-5. Additionally, and pursuant to the commenter’s recommendation, a measure has been added to SPR HYD-5 that prohibits herbicide application within Class I and II WLPZs unless: herbicide application is necessary to meet program objectives; the appropriate regional water quality control board is notified no fewer than 15 days prior to herbicide application; and the reasons it is infeasible to prohibit herbicide application in a WLPZ is documented in the PSA. Restrictions on the use of herbicides within Class III and IV WLPZs will remain dependent on the presence or absence of native riparian vegetation, as required by SPR HYD-5 and SPR BIO-4.

###### Comment A17-4

3. Vegetation treatments performed using application of herbicides shall not cause herbicides to be detected in surface waters.

The Water Boards look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection and your staff in planning and permitting activities related to implementation of the CalVTP. Phil Crader, Assistant Deputy Director with the State Water Resources Control Board, is the Water Boards’ point of contact relating to CalVTP implementation. Should you or your staff have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Crader.

###### Response A17-4

As described in SPR HYD-1, all projects implemented under the CalVTP would comply with applicable water quality regulations and Basin Plan prohibitions. Refer to response to comment A17-3 for additional discussion of water quality protections related to herbicide application. Implementation of the SPRs and mitigation measures described in response to comment A17-3 and in master response 9 would avoid and minimize impacts from herbicide application on water quality. Further, the proposed CalVTP limits herbicide use to ground application methods to protect sensitive resources and apply compounds only to targeted vegetation. Implementation of these protections and compliance with the requirements of the herbicide label would effectively minimize the potential risks to water quality. Additional limitations on herbicide application, such as monitoring for detection in surface waters, are not necessary to maintain impacts at or reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Letter A18 **Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority**

Paul Edelman, Chief of Natural Resources and Planning

August 8, 2019

###### Comment A18-1

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) manages over 70,000 acres of open space in Los Angeles and Ventura counties including all lands owned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, State of California. The majority of these lands support chaparral vegetation along with approximately 1,500 acres of coastal sage scrub and more inland Venturan sage scrub.

The health and diversity of chaparral and coastal sage vegetation is particularly susceptible to soil disturbance and ill-timed and repeated fire events. Both communities are also susceptible to excessive levels of mechanical and manual disturbance. Likewise, overly light mechanical and manual treatments may not yield the desired level of fire protection. No matter how good this Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) is, and how good subsequent site specific plans are to physically clear these two community types, the knowledge, focus, and commitment of the people doing the actual clearance is what will determine the acceptability of both the immediate and multi-year outcomes. This PEIR does and cannot include an analysis of how such onsite protection can be provided under the proposed wholesale level of vegetation clearance or fuel reduction.

###### Response A18-1

It is acknowledged that qualified professionals acting in good faith to implement the SPRs and mitigation measures identified in the PEIR will achieve the intended environmental protection during implementation of the proposed CalVTP. Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the PSA and environmental protection for later vegetation treatment projects.

###### Comment A18-2

Another major factor not sufficiently addressed in the PEIR is that fluctuating annual soil moisture conditions can totally alter the current time ecological acceptability of mechanical and manual treatments. Both the above and below ground adverse effects of clearance during dry and particularly cumulative drought years, could often warrant holding off clearing until there is vegetation recovery from sufficient rainfall. The PEIR cannot provide this level of biological sensitivity. As a result, without required subsequent public environmental review, otherwise easily avoidable significant ecological impacts would occur frequently in chaparral and coastal sage scrub communities because of pressure to proceed from fire agencies and other advocates.

###### Response A18-2

Refer to Master Response 3 regarding treatments in chaparral and coastal sage scrub.

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding project-specific evaluation of later treatment projects under the CalVTP, which would require site-specific identification and analysis of biological resources, including implementation of various SPRs that require site specific review of biological resources information and surveys of a later treatment project area (e.g., SPRs BIO-1, BIO-3, BIO-7, BIO-8, BIO-10).

Refer to Master Response 5 regarding public review pursuant to CEQA and Master Response 6 regarding public accessibility of information and opportunity for public input on proposed projects.

###### Comment A18-3

SPR BIO-5 states, “Avoid environmental effects of type conversion and maintain function in chaparral and coastal sage scrub.” That policy is of course excellent in concept but extremely difficult and expensive to implement because of the combined knowledge and site specific attention necessary to ensure that outcome over thousand of variable acres.

###### Response A18-3

No specific issues related to the content, analysis, or conclusions in the Draft PEIR are raised in this comment. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A18-4

The MRCA can support PEIR Alternative B because it provides a reduced acreage program (60,000 acres annually) limited just to fuel reduction in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) statewide. However, based on the PEIR analysis Alternative B has no legs with a total absence of prescribed burns, herbicide, fuel breaks, and restoration as program tools.

###### Response A18-4

The commenter’s expression of support for Alternative B will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP. As stated in Section 6.2.3, “Alternative B – WUI Fuel Reduction Only,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, treatment activities would be the same as those described for the proposed program and would include a combination of prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, manual treatment, prescribed herbivory, and herbicide application. The commenter is correct that Alternative B would not include the fuel break or ecological restoration treatment types.

###### Comment A18-5

As presented in the PEIR, the MRCA cannot support any other project alternatives (each with 250,000 acres affected annually) until the inclusion of fuel breaks is removed from chaparral and coastal sage scrub vegetation communities along with prescribed burns as is put forth in Alternative C. From our experience, approximately 90 percent of all fuel breaks within and proximate to MRCA managed lands do not stop wind driven fires and result in a permanent substantial sources of erosion and vectors for the spread of non-native invasive vegetation. Fuel breaks and staging areas have their place in the MRCA’s management of natural lands but not in the wholesale, pre-approved fashion of the relevant project alternatives.

###### Response A18-5

The commenter’s expression of opposition to other project alternatives will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A18-6

MRCA recommends an alternative that would be limited to 60,000 acres of WUI fuel reduction but does not categorically exclude the use of herbicide and does put an emphasis on restoration.

###### Response A18-6

The PEIR includes a reasonable range of alternatives that contain different combinations of treatment types, treatment activities, and geographic scopes. The PEIR describes that the alternatives were identified based on input provided by agencies, organizations, and individuals during interagency consultation and review of the notice of preparation. It also describes how the alternatives evaluated in detail were selected based on three screening criteria: (1) their ability to accomplish all or most of the project objectives, (2) whether they were potentially feasible, and (3) their ability to avoid or substantially lessen any significant effects of the proposed CalVTP (see Sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 in Chapter 6, “Alternatives,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR). Treatment of 60,000 acres in WUI would not meet the objectives of the program.

Letter A19 **Ventura County Department of Public Works, Watershed Protection**

Sergio Vargas, Deputy Director

August 8, 2019

###### Comment A19-1

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the subject document. Attached are the comments that we have received resulting from intra-county review of the subject document. Additional comments may have been sent directly to you by other County agencies.

Your proposed responses to these comments should be sent directly to the commenter, with a copy to Anthony Ciuffetelli, Ventura County Planning Division, L#1740, 800 S. Victoria Avenue, Ventura, CA 93009.

If you have any questions regarding any of the comments, please contact the appropriate respondent. Overall questions may be directed to Anthony Ciuffetelli at (805) 654-2443.

###### Response A19-1

The comment summarizes detailed comments provided elsewhere in the comment letter. See responses to comments A19-2 through A19-18.

###### Comment A19-2

Pursuant to your request dated July 2, 2019, this office has reviewed the submitted materials and provides the following comments.

**PROJECT LOCATION:**

California - Statewide

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

Expansion of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's (CAL FIRE's) vegetation treatment activities to reach a total treatment acreage target of approximately 250,000 acres per year to contribute to the achievement of the 500,000 annual non­federal acres expressed in Executive Order (EO) B-52-18, signed by former Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. in May 2018.

The California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) is proposed by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) to treat vegetation that could become fire fuel to meet this Order. The purpose of the CalVTP is to serve as one component of the state's range of actions to reduce wildfire risk and diminish or avoid the harmful effects of wildfire on people, property, and natural resources within the CAL FIRE's State Responsibility Area (SRA).

###### Response A19-2

The summary of the proposed CalVTP is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A19-3

**WATERSHED PROTECTION DISTRICT COMMENTS:**

1. The Ventura County Watershed Protection District (District) commends the Board for their strategy to reduce wildfire risk and greenhouse gas emissions. Nevertheless, the District believes there is a disconnect between CalVTP's objective to increase the treatment of vegetation to at least 500,000 acres (Objective 2) and managing forests as a net carbon sink (Objective 4). The two objectives appear to be in conflict as the vegetation is a carbon sink, the removal of which would reduce carbon emission sequestration.

###### Response A19-3

As discussed in Section 2.2, “Objectives of the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the goal of the CalVTP is to treat 250,000 acres, which would contribute to the statewide goal of 500,000 acres. As discussed under “State” in Section 3.8.1, “Regulatory Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, recent trends indicate that from 2001 to 2010, approximately 120 million metric tons of carbon were lost through wildland fire. California’s climate objective for natural and working lands is to maintain them as a carbon sink (i.e., net zero or negative GHG emissions) and, where appropriate, minimize the net GHG and black carbon emissions associated with management, biomass utilization, and wildfire events. As further discussed under “Vegetation (Fuel) Management” in Section 3.17.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, another study found simulated fuel treatments in the Lake Tahoe basin returned the forest to more historic and fire-resilient conditions, reduced wildfire risk and severity, controlled wildfire carbon emissions, and in the long run, resulted in a net carbon gain (Loudermilk et al. 2014).

###### Comment A19-4

2. The District contends that a 300-foot-wide fuel break (Page 2-13) is too wide for most ridgelines in Ventura County. We have observed that denuded hillsides contribute to adverse ecological succession from chaparral or forested habitats to non-native grasslands dominated by highly invasive weedy species including mustards and thistles. These conditions tend to increase the risk of fast-moving wildfires and reduces habitat available to sensitive species. We appreciate the intent and agree that any proposed fuel break should require a biological assessment on a case-by-case basis.

###### Response A19-4

As discussed under “Fuel Breaks” in Section 2.5.1, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the 300-foot-wide fuel break was used as a typical or average width for fuel breaks; however, the width of each fuel break would vary depending on the location, vegetation, and topography. Potential effects of fuel breaks on chaparral and forested habitats are discussed in Section 3.6, “Biological Resources,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. As discussed in Section 3.6, SPRs and mitigation measures would be incorporated to avoid and minimize adverse ecological impacts. As noted by the commenter, a PSA will be prepared for each later activity to further evaluate and minimize site-specific impacts.

###### Comment A19-5

3. Ecological Treatments (Page 2-16). Burning and mulching vegetation does not necessarily work. Furthermore, we can only assume what the pre-historic fire regimes were and believe that most of the State has burned at least once or twice in the last 100 years. Replacement of shrublands with non-native grasses and herbs as a result of increased fire frequency and disturbance has de-stabilized slopes, degraded wildlife habitat, and increased runoff. Non-native vegetation control (SPR 810-9) should be a large component of any restoration program. Giant reed and other large woody non-native plants carry fire and increase intensity so they should be targeted for eradication/control.

###### Response A19-5

As stated in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resources Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, SPR BIO-9 applies to all treatments.

###### Comment A19-6

4. Mechanical Vegetation Treatment (Page 2-23). Mechanical treatments are described as more expensive based on the removal requirements of non­commercial biomass as cited in North et al. 2012. Please elaborate in the text what some of these removal requirements are and why they're more expensive. Mulching on site reduces biomass to small, quick to decompose pieces, which reduces fuel load. In addition, green resprouting shrubs/trees would take several years of growth to become a fuel threat following mechanical treatment. The District contends that mechanical treatments are a good option and should be considered.

###### Response A19-6

The average cost of mechanical treatments that require biomass off-hauling is 3.5 times that of prescribed burning because of the labor, fuel, and equipment costs associated with hauling material from a treatment site to a disposal location. However, as discussed under “Mechanical Treatments” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, only 5 percent of the proposed mechanical treatments are expected to require off-hauling of biomass. In addition, as discussed in Section 2.5.3, “Distribution of Treatment Activities,” mechanical treatments are expected to be implemented for approximately 20 percent of the total treatments. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A19-7

5. Herbicide Application (Page 2-27). “Site specificity is achieved by having a clear description of the site when the permit is issued. Because permits are issued for a 12- or 24-month period, time-specificity is achieved by having the permittee file a “notice of intent” to apply the herbicide at least 24 hours before the scheduled application.” A 24 hour notice may not be enough time, especially if the public wishes to be informed of any herbicide application in the area.

###### Response A19-7

As discussed under “Herbicide Application” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, CAL FIRE would file a “notice of intent” with the County Agricultural Commissioner *at least* 24 hours before scheduled herbicide applications, consistent with DPR requirements. The notice would describe the site to be treated and the herbicides to be applied. It also would contain information on any changes in the environmental setting (e.g., construction of residences or schools in the area or changes in vegetation cover types that have occurred since the permit was issued). This notice allows the County Agricultural Commissioner an additional opportunity to review the planned application and apply additional restrictions if needed. In addition, SPR HAZ-9 requires all project proponents to post signs at each end of herbicide treatment areas and any intersecting trails notifying the public of the use of herbicides for herbicide applications occurring within 500 feet of public recreation areas, residential areas, schools, or any other public areas. Signs would be posted prior to the start of treatment, and notification would remain in place for at least 72 hours after treatment ceases. Project proponents, such as local agencies implementing herbicide applications under the CalVTP, may require additional public notifications beyond what is required by measures in the CalVTP PEIR when applying herbicides.

Refer also to Master Response 6 regarding the public availability of information on proposed and approved vegetation treatment projects, which will include identification of proposed or planned treatment activities (e.g., herbicide application).

###### Comment A19-8

6. SPR BIO-4 (Page 2-37). “Only hand application of herbicides will be allowed and only during low-flow periods or when seasonal streams are dry.” The District suggests a biological monitor be present during herbicide application in both riparian and upland habitats to ensure the proper plant species are treated and all required protocols are observed.

###### Response A19-8

SPR HAZ-6 and SPR HYD-5 list several measures that must be implemented to protect against inadvertent application to nontarget vegetation and ensure compliance with herbicide application regulations, including coordinating with the applicable County Agricultural Commissioner(s), obtaining required licenses and permits, applying only with an applicator appropriately licensed by the state, using only herbicides labeled for use in aquatic environments when working in riparian habitats, using herbicides containing dye when applying within 50 feet of listed plant species, not applying herbicides when wind speeds are 7 mph or greater, not applying herbicides during precipitation events or if precipitation occurred within 24 hours before or is forecast within 24 hours after project activities. These measures are adequately protective, and no additional measures are required. Refer also to Master Response 9 regarding herbicide application.

###### Comment A19-9

7. SPR BIO-5 (Page 2-38). “Develop a treatment design that avoids environmental effects of type conversion ... “ The District requests to review the treatment design for projects in Ventura County.

###### Response A19-9

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and Master Response 3 regarding compliance with regulations, including SB 1260.

###### Comment A19-10

8. SPR BIO-5 (Page 2-38). “The treatment design will seek to maintain a minimum percent cover of mature native shrubs within the treatment area to maintain habitat function ... “ The District requests that such treatments be conducted in a manner to avoid erosion and sedimentation that could alter adjacent regulated streams or District facilities. In addition, treatment should avoid reducing shrub cover because these vegetation types usually occur on slopes, which will be easily eroded if shrub cover is reduced. Shrubs preclude many herbaceous species, which can exacerbate fire.

###### Response A19-10

SPR GEO-7 includes protections to reduce the potential for erosion and sedimentation resulting from program activities. No heavy equipment will be used on slopes steeper than 65 percent or on slopes greater than 50 percent where the erosion hazard is high or where slopes lead without flattening to a watercourse or lake. Additionally, SPR GEO-8 requires that an RPF or licensed geologist evaluate treatment areas with slopes greater than 50 percent for unstable areas and that the project be implemented in a way that would prevent substantial loss of topsoil. Furthermore, SPR HYD-1 establishes WLPZs with widths increasing with slope and the sensitivity of the water feature. WLPZ protections include overstory and understory retention and ground disturbance limitations. These vegetation retention guidelines, as well as the shrub protection provisions of SPR BIO-5, would retain shrub vegetation in coastal shrublands (i.e., coastal sage scrub and chaparral) while reducing wildfire risk.

###### Comment A19-11

9. SPR BIO-5 (Page 2-39). “A minimum of 35 percent of existing shrubs and associated native vegetation will be retained ... “ The District suggests striking this statement and relying on a reduction by no more than 20 percent from baseline density; 35 percent vegetative coverage is not enough to protect against erosion and preserve habitat integrity.

###### Response A19-11

In the absence of established guidelines and standards, professional judgment was used to establish the following guidelines: retention of a minimum of 35-percent relative cover of existing shrubs and associated native vegetation, and removal of no more than 20 percent from the baseline density through thinning. As described in Section 3.6.1, “Environmental Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, according to the state classification system, a stand of vegetation where woody shrubs or subshrubs are conspicuous throughout, shrub cover is at least 10 percent, and tree canopy cover is generally less than 10 percent is classified as a shrubland. Therefore, if at least 35 percent of relative cover of shrubs is maintained within a shrub-dominated treatment area, it is reasonable to assume that the treated stand of vegetation would continue to be characterized by shrubs and that those remaining shrubs would provide a seed source for shrub regeneration so that the habitat would not be converted to one dominated by herbaceous cover and no longer meeting the classification criteria of a shrubland. Additionally, SPR BIO-5 requires the project proponent to demonstrate with substantial evidence that the habitat function of chaparral and coastal sage scrub, including its function in erosion control, would be at least maintained.

###### Comment A19-12

10. SPR BIO-9 (Page 2-41). The District contends that the treatment of invasive plants is critical to restoration efforts. Furthermore, the District suggests the following revision: “This SPR applies to all treatment activities and treatment types throughout the State.” The requirement to prevent the spread of these species should also be described earlier in the document to better integrate this component into the overall plan activities.

###### Response A19-12

As discussed in Section 2.1, “Overview of the CalVTP,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the geographic extent of the CalVTP is the treatable landscape rather than the entire state. No change to the PEIR is warranted.

###### Comment A19-13

11. SPR BIO-10 (Page 2-41). Measures to prevent the spread of invasive wildlife, including New Zealand mudsnail, have been omitted. New Zealand mudsnail can be transported on equipment and clothing during treatment activities. An SPR similar to SPR 810-9 should be created specifically to address the spread of invasive wildlife species.

###### Response A19-13

SPR HYD-4 in Section 2.7.9, “Hydrology and Water Quality Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR includes measures to protect WLPZs as defined in California Forest Practice Rules. These measures include prohibitions of equipment within wet areas or WLPZs and equipment limitation zones adjacent to Class III and Class IV watercourses. Additionally, no in-water work or water drafting is proposed under the CalVTP. Therefore, the potential for spread of New Zealand mudsnail as a result of implementation of project-specific treatment activities would be low; however, SPR BIO-9 in Section 2.7.9, “Biological Resource Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been revised to include New Zealand mudsnail as a potential invasive species that could be spread during treatment activities, and measures in SPR BIO-9 have been updated to include measures to prevent the spread of invasive wildlife (e.g., New Zealand mudsnail).

###### Comment A19-14

12. SPR GEO-3 (Page 2-42). “The project proponent will stabilize soil disturbed during mechanical and prescribed herbivory treatments with mulch or equivalent immediately after treatment activities ... “ The District requests to review and approve any stabilization efforts adjacent to a District facility or regulated stream channel in Ventura County.

###### Response A19-14

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A19-15

13. SPR GEO-4 (Page 2-43). “The project proponent will inspect treatment areas for the proper implementation of erosion control SPRs and mitigations prior to the rainy season. Any area of erosion that will result in substantial sediment discharge will be remediated.” The District requests to be notified, review, and approve any such activities conducted adjacent to a District facility or regulated stream channel in Ventura County. In addition, the District believes the remediation of substantial sediment discharge requires a programmatic measure (i.e., an erosion control plan for each action).

###### Response A19-15

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A19-16

14. SPR HYD-6 (Page 2-47). “If a drainage structure or infiltration system is inadvertently disturbed or modified during project activities, the project proponent will coordinate with owner of the system or feature to repair any damage and ensure that pre-project drainage conditions are restored.” The District requests that the project proponent coordinate with the property owner prior to the proposed action to obtain any necessary permits and/or access agreements.

###### Response A19-16

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A19-17

15. SPR TRAN-1 (Page 2-48). The District requests that when working adjacent to a protected drainage system (e.g., a flood control facility) the project proponent shall coordinate with the facility owner/operator to ensure access coordination including but not limited to easements and right-of-way use.

###### Response A19-17

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A19-18

16. Potential Permits and Approvals - Local (Page 2-49). Please add Special Districts, including the Ventura County Watershed Protection District to the list of local permitting agencies. The District provides encroachment permits and regulates activities that have the potential to adversely affect water quality.

###### Response A19-18

As requested by the commenter, special districts have been added to the list of local permitting agencies; refer to Section 2.8, “Potential Permits and Approvals Required,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

Letter A20 **Placer County Air Pollution Control District**

Ann Hobbs, Associate Planner

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A20-1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the California Vegetation Treatment Program Environmental Impact Report (CalVTP PTEIR). The following are the Placer County Air Pollution Control District (PCAPCD) comments.

The following comments are regarding Chapter 3 Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigations Measures Comments.

1. Under Section California Code of Regulations Title 17, on page 3.4‐6 there may be a mis‐spelling in the last sentence in the third paragraph.

###### Response A20-1

The acronym “CCAA” under “California Code of Regulations Title 17” in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR refers to the California Clean Air Act. The acronym “CAA” in this sentence refers to the federal Clean Air Act. No revisions are warranted.

###### Comment A20-2

2. Under Section Prescribed Fire Incident Reporting System (PFIRS) program on page 3.4‐6, the background on the beginning of PFIRS is provided below. PFIRS was first discussed and presented to the Interagency Air and Smoke Council (IASC) in 1994. From the 1994 meeting minutes held at the Placer County Air Pollution Control District files: “PFIRS is a consensus effort between agencies utilizing and conducting fire activities throughout California. The goal of the program is the coordination of prescribed fires conducted on a daily basis, reducing the impacts of individual multiple prescribed fires through a structured information‐based system”.

PFIRS was developed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and went through many iterations, including the use of modems for communication. In the earlier versions of PFIRS a land manager could dial up and log in where prescribed burning was going to occur so that better communication could be used to determine if smoke could become a problem. In the early 2000s the California Air Resources Board (CARB) agreed to host the PFIRS program and worked with the USFS to hire a contractor to help develop an online program that would provide information on where prescribed burning would take place.

As the use of the internet expanded, work on the program came in house to the CARB Meteorology Section whose staff had the necessary skills to develop PFIRS into an online program. During that time, in consultation with those who had help create the original program, it was agreed that the name could be changed from Prescribed Fire Incident Reporting System to Prescribed Fire Information Reporting System. During the early online development, a small group of users, which included both the Placer County Air Pollution Control District and the El Dorado Air Quality Management District, beta tested the program with land managers in the Lake Tahoe area. This included the first online use of a smoke management plan, along with moving to an online authorization system where burns were displayed on a map. This work henceforth laid the ground‐work for the widespread use and continued development of the USFS’ original program. In addition to the PCAPCD records, historical records from IASC notes and minutes regarding PFIRS can be found at the following link: https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/smp/progdev/iasc/historyiasc.pdf

###### Response A20-2

The comment does not raise any specific issues with the adequacy of the PEIR. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A20-3

3. Under Section California Air Districts on page 3.4‐7, in the last paragraph, what is CAAA?

###### Response A20-3

“CAAA” is an abbreviation for the federal Clean Air Act Amendments. The text has been revised to identify this acronym at its first use in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A20-4

4. Under Section Burn Day Designations and Smoke Management Plans on page 3.4‐11, it should be noted that the California Health and Safety Code divides burning into Agricultural (41850) and Non‐Agricultural Burning (41800). This distinction has been provided by the State legislature in which the definition of Prescribed Burning is a sub‐category. The current Agricultural Burning definition and the Public Resource Code change occurred in 2004. The legislative intent for this change was to establish a consistent definition for prescribed burning.

Health and Safety Code Section 39001

“Agricultural burning” means open outdoor fires used in any of the following:

(a) Agricultural operations in the growing of crops or raising of fowl or animals, or open outdoor fires used in forest management, range improvement, or the improvement of land for wildlife and game habitat, or disease or pest prevention.

(b) The operation or maintenance of a system for the delivery of water for the purposes specified in subdivision (a).

(c) Wildland vegetation management burning.

(1) For purposes of this subdivision, wildland vegetation management burning is the use of prescribed burning conducted by a public agency, or through a cooperative agreement or contract involving a public agency, to burn land predominantly covered with chaparral, trees, grass, or standing brush.

(2) For purposes of this subdivision, prescribed burning is the planned application and confinement of fire to wildland fuels on lands selected in advance of that application to achieve any of the following objectives:

(A) Prevention of high‐intensity wildland fires through reduction of the volume and continuity of wildland fuels.

(B) Watershed management.

(C) Range improvement.

(D) Vegetation management.

(E) Forest improvement.

(F) Wildlife habitat improvement.

(G) Air quality maintenance.

(3) The planned application of fire may include natural or accidental ignition. (Amended by Stats. 2004, Ch. 693, Sec. 1. Effective January 1, 2005.)

Public Resource Code 4464:

(a) “Wildland” means any land that is classified as a state responsibility area pursuant to Article 3 (commencing with Section 4125) of Chapter 1 and includes any land having a plant cover consisting principally of grasses, forbs, or shrubs that are valuable for forage. “Wildland” also means any lands that are contiguous to lands classified as a state responsibility area if wildland fuel accumulation is such that a wildland fire occurring on these lands would pose a threat to the adjacent state responsibility area.

(b) “Wildland fuel” means any timber, brush, grass, or other flammable vegetation, living or dead, standing or down.

(c) “Wildland fire” means any uncontrolled fire burning on wildland.

(d) “Prescribed burning” or “prescribed burning operation” means the planned application and confinement of fire to wildland fuels on lands selected in advance of that application to achieve any of the following objectives:

(1) Prevention of high‐intensity wildland fires through reduction of the volume and continuity of wildland fuels.

(2) Watershed management.

(3) Range improvement.

(4) Vegetation management.

(5) Forest improvement.

(6) Wildlife habitat improvement.

(7) Air quality maintenance.

(e) “Prescribed burn crew” means personnel and firefighting equipment of the department that are prepared to contain fire set in a prescribed burning operation and to suppress any fire that escapes during a prescribed burning operation.

(f) “Person” means any natural person, firm, association, partnership, business trust, corporation, limited liability company, company, or combination thereof, or any public agency other than an agency of the federal government.

###### Response A20-4

As requested by the commenter, the text under “Burn Day Designations and Smoke Management Plans” in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been revised to clarify that prescribed burning is a subset of agricultural burning in California Health and Safety Code Section 39001.

###### Comment A20-5

Air Districts were required by the California Code of Regulation to adopt, implement and enforce a smoke management program under Title 17, Section 80140. Air District Programs can be found on CARB’s website: https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/smp/district/district.htm Some Air Districts have incorporated the Smoke Management Guidelines into their District Regulations, such as PCAPCD. These rules cannot be less stringent than the state’s. In some cases, Air District burn rules have been adopted into the State Implementation Plan, such as those in PCAPCD. An addition of an appendix showing the different Air District rules from the CARB Title 17 Guidelines, to this document would be helpful.

###### Response A20-5

SPR AD-3 requires each project proponent to design and implement the treatment in a manner that is consistent with applicable local plans (e.g., general plans), policies, and ordinances to the extent the project is subject to them; this would require the consideration of local air district rules. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A20-6

5. In Section Burn Day Designations and Smoke Management Plans in the fourth paragraph, on page 3.4‐11, there a phrase at the end “and the risk of a burn escape”. While no one wants a burn to escape, the responsibility in conducting a prescribed burn along with the risk of a burn escape is the responsibility of the land manager, not the Air District.

A local air district approves the smoke management plan, may issue a burn permit with or without conditions, and approves a land manager’s authorization to conduct a prescribed burn. The work that goes into the smoke management plan is based upon what the land manager inputs, the conditions under which they are planning a prescribed burn, based on location, vegetation, weather, emissions and population areas. The District works with a land manager to minimize smoke impacts, while acknowledging that there may be periodic smoke impacts.

The local air district is not the ultimate arbiter of whether a burn can occur as proposed. The land manager’s go/no go decision is based upon a myriad of criteria, in addition to air quality conditions before they make the decision to burn. The prescriptive conditions include air quality, wind, precipitation, time of year to burn, vegetation moisture, or enough staffing, wildlife. Some of this is also noted in the document on page 3.17‐6 under Planning a Prescribed Burn and under Executing a Prescribed Burn on page 3.17‐8. These sections should have similar language.

###### Response A20-6

The text in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been revised to clarify that the responsibility of properly conducting a prescribed burn and managing the risk of a burn escape is the responsibility of the burn manager.

###### Comment A20-7

In the last paragraph, given this is a California document, what would the percentage of burns accomplished with no reported escapes or near misses be for just California based on more current information than 2005?

###### Response A20-7

The best available relevant information is from Dether 2005 as cited in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, which indicates that the results of a comprehensive study of prescribed burns nationally indicate that 99 percent of burns were accomplished within the prescription and did not report escapes or near misses. As explained further in response to comment O28-108, additional reviews of escaped prescribed fires reported prescribed fires escaping between 0.08 and 1.5 percent of the time (Weir et al. 2015; WFLLC 2012).

###### Comment A20-8

6. In Section Criteria Air Pollutant Emissions from Wildfires and Prescribed Burns on page 3.4‐18, paragraph five, hazardous smoke has impacted populous areas more in the last few years, since the widespread wildfires in 2008. However, many smaller communities have had many days and weeks with unhealthy to hazardous air quality from smoke that should be mentioned. As an example, areas in the North Coast portion of California have had weeks of unhealthy to hazardous air quality in the last few years from wildfire smoke.

###### Response A20-8

The section in the PEIR cited by the commenter states that “[r]ecent major wildfires have created hazardous air pollution conditions requiring health advisories and ‘spare the air’ days far from the site of the fire. For instance, during the Camp Fire in Butte County, air quality became hazardous not only in Chico near the fire, but also more than one hundred miles away in more heavily populated communities, such as in Sacramento, Modesto, and San Francisco (Rowan 2018).” The clear implication is that there are many smaller communities between the fire and the heavily populated areas far from the site of the fire. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A20-9

7. In Section Naturally Occurring Asbestos (NOA) on page 3.4‐19, there is no mention of the adoption of the California Air Resources Board’s Air Toxic Control Measure for Construction, Grading, Quarrying and Surface Mining Operations. This statewide regulation is used by the Air Districts, at a minimum for dust control activities in those areas with NOA. Additionally, these requirements, may be included in an Air District’s rules such as is case with the PCAPCD’s Rule 228 – Fugitive Dust.

###### Response A20-9

The state’s regulations related to naturally occurring asbestos are identified in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting.” The text identified in the comment is in Section 3.4.2, “Environmental Setting.”

###### Comment A20-10

8. In Section Existing Levels of Emissions Generated By Wildfires on page 3.4‐21 paragraph three, it does not seem appropriate that this document implies that the 2018 wildfires particulate matter emissions were more than the wildfire emissions from 2008. This information should have the appropriate reference provided if this is true.

###### Response A20-10

In Section 3.4.2, “Environmental Setting,” the PEIR explains that “it is likely that particulate matter emissions from 2018 wildfires would exceed the numbers shown for 2008” due to the relatively large size of the wildfires in 2018. It is reasonable to assume that larger fires result in more emissions. A citation is not warranted.

###### Comment A20-11

9. In Section 3.4.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures on page 3.4‐22, it should be noted under SPR AD‐4 Public Notifications for Prescribed Burning that Title 17 of the CCR, Section 80160 – Special Requirements for Prescribed Burning and Prescribed Fires in Wildland and Wildland/Urban Interface Areas, subsection (l), each Air District’s smoke management program is to “Require procedures for public notification and education, including appropriate signage at burn sites, and for reporting of public smoke complaints”. Public notification information is a required component of the PCAPCD’s smoke management plan.

###### Response A20-11

Project proponents must comply with applicable laws and regulations, including Title 17 of CCR Section 80160. The text in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” has been revised to include information about public noticing required pursuant to Title 17 of CCR Section 80160. SPR AD-4 is consistent with the requirements of Title 17 of CCR Section 80160 (Special Requirements for Prescribed Burning and Prescribed Fires in Wildland and Wildland/Urban Interface Areas), subsection (l).

SPR AD-3 (Consistency with Local Plans, Policies, and Ordinances) requires each project proponent to design and implement the treatment in a manner that is consistent with applicable local plans (e.g., general plans), policies, and ordinances, including local air district rules, to the extent the project is subject to them.

###### Comment A20-12

10. In SPR AQ‐2 Submit Smoke Management Plan on page 3.4‐23, please include Title 17 Section 80160(d), which states “If smoke may impact smoke sensitive areas, require smoke management plans…..”. This section means that smoke management plans may be required for prescribed burns less than 10 acres or less than one ton of particulate matter.

###### Response A20-12

Project proponents must comply with applicable laws and regulations, including Title 17 of CCR Section 80160. The text in Section 3.4.1, “Regulatory Setting,” has been revised to include information about public noticing requirements and information regarding the preparation of smoke management plans for burns producing smoke that may affect smoke-sensitive areas, pursuant to 17 CCR Section 80160. SPR AQ-2 has also been revised to clarify that Smoke management Plans are required for a prescribed burn in accordance with 17 CCR Section 80160. Pursuant to this regulation, a Smoke Management Plan will not be required for burns less than 10 acres that also will not be conducted near smoke-sensitive areas, unless otherwise directed by the air district.

###### Comment A20-13

11. Under Section SPR AQ‐4 Minimize Dust – please include Air District Fugitive Dust rules if adopted by an Air District since these rules are the local applicable regulations to be used, especially if more these rules are more restrictive than CARB regulations.

Health and Safety Code Section 41700 has been mentioned regarding visible dust transport outside the treatment area. It is important to note that this section of the Health and Safety Code is not limited to dust but includes odor and smoke. Many Air Districts have included this Health and Safety Code into their regulations such as PCAPCD’s Rule 205 Nuisance. https://placerair.org/DocumentCenter/View/2181/Rule‐205‐PDF

###### Response A20-13

SPR AD-3 (Consistency with Local Plans, Policies, and Ordinances) requires each project proponent to design and implement the treatment in a manner that is consistent with applicable local plans (e.g., general plans), policies, and ordinances, including local air district rules, to the extent the project is subject to them.

###### Comment A20-14

12. In Appendix PD‐2 it should be noted that the smoke management plan included is from an air district in California which includes additional information that is not required in the Title 17 Smoke Management Guidelines. This plan does not reflect all air district smoke management plans. It may be more appropriate to use the plan that is provided on the CARB Smoke Management Program website which was created by CARB after the adoption of the Title 17 guidelines as an example. https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/smp/techtool/techtool.htm

###### Response A20-14

Appendix PD-2 has been revised to include the Smoke Management Plan developed by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association as an additional example, as provided on CARB’s Smoke Management Program Technical Tools webpage (https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/smp/techtool/techtool.htm).

###### Comment A20-15

13. In Section Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures, Impact AQ‐1, Generate Emissions of Criteria Air Pollutants and Precursors during Treatment Activities that Would Exceed CAAQS or NAAQS and Conflict with Regional Air Quality Plans on page 3.4‐26, the following comments are provided under the subsection Localized Concentrations of Criteria Air Pollutants.

Prescribed burning typically does not occur during the high ozone concentration time, May to October, when high ozone levels form. This is also wildfire season. Prescribed burning activities can be very seasonal (as noted on page 3.17‐6 under Planning a Prescribed Burn). Underburns and broadcast burns are typically conducted at times when conditions are right for burning. In many areas this is in the spring, after wet weather has passed, or the fall, when cooler atmospheric conditions begin (which make smoke dispersion harder). Although, in prior years before the 2007 Angora Fire ‐ South Lake Tahoe, in Placer County, the USFS did conduct in season hand pile burning during the summer months. (Authorization to burn information on file at the PCAPCD Office.)

###### Response A20-15

Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” of Volume II of this Final PEIR explains that “burning may occur throughout the year, but it is usually conducted during late spring when the ground is still wet, or during the fall or winter when precipitation is imminent, and plants have completed their yearly growth cycle and their moisture content has declined.” The comment does not raise any specific issues with the adequacy of the PEIR. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A20-16

Machine pile burning occurs usually after significant wetting rains or snows so that these piles can burn for extended periods into more winter wet weather. Hand pile burning can occur throughout the year as this is a type of burning that is much easier to have fewer staff burn with easier decision making on daily burning. Prescribed burning also takes place during those times of year when wood burning device (woodstoves and fireplaces) use begins along with other types of outdoor burning, such as residential backyard burning.

###### Response A20-16

In Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” the DEIR explains that pile burning generally occurs “during wet periods of the year” and that “burning may occur throughout the year, but it is usually conducted during late spring when the ground is still wet, or during the fall or winter when precipitation is imminent, and plants have completed their yearly growth cycle and their moisture content has declined.” The comment does not raise any specific issues with the adequacy of the PEIR. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A20-17

Under Sub‐Section Smoke Emissions from Prescribed Burns on page 3.4‐30, will the new emergency regulations from Cal/OSHA be addressed?

###### Response A20-17

Impact AQ-1, Section 3.4.3, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures,” has been revised to mention Cal/OSHA’s Emergency Regulation to Protect Outdoor Workers from Wildfire Smoke.

###### Comment A20-18

14. Under Section 3.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions on page 3.8‐13 there appears to be a typo for the total which should be 4.051 MMTCO2e (as noted on page 3.8‐14 ‐ Table 3.8‐4), instead of 4,051 MMTCO2e.

###### Response A20-18

The text in Impact GHG-2, Section 3.8.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” has been revised to correct all instances of “4,051 MMTCO2e” to “4.051 MMTCO2e.”

###### Comment A20-19

The following comments are regarding Section 4 Cumulative Effects Analysis:

1. There is no discussion regarding repetitive treatments of the same area. Once a prescribed burn, mechanical treatment occurs, or other treatment occurs, it will need to be maintained on a regular basis. Vegetation is like a crop, it keeps growing and from that standpoint, a one‐time treatment of prescribed fire or mastication, for example, will not maintain that treatment.

###### Response A20-19

As described under “Treatment Maintenance” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, treatment maintenance is a component inherent in the proposed program. Maintenance is considered in the analysis of impacts of the proposed CalVTP in Chapter 3, “Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures,” which are evaluated in Chapter 4, “Cumulative Effects Analysis,” for their potential to contribute to existing cumulative impacts; refer to Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A20-20

The following additional comments are provided following the review of the document.

1. The use of masticators can do a good job decimating the vegetation, with high soil disturbance, leaving behind the masticated vegetation including seeds for future vegetation growth. How will this be managed beyond the first vegetation management application? Will masticated areas also be treated with prescribed fire?

###### Response A20-20

As discussed under “Treatment Maintenance” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, most treatments require maintenance; however, the maintenance interval varies widely. For example, treatment in tree-dominated vegetation types might initially involve a mechanical or manual treatment to reduce surface and ladder fuels. Following that initial activity, prescribed burning could be used at 10- to 15-year intervals to maintain the lower fuel hazard in consideration of the natural fire return interval of the vegetation community and other environmental factors, as well as treatment objectives. In addition, refer to Master Response 2 for additional detail related to treatment maintenance.

###### Comment A20-21

2. The mastication of scotch broom should not be an option as it can spread the plant’s seeds making it more of a problem. In many areas where scotch broom is pulled it is burned to prevent the spread of seeds.

###### Response A20-21

As discussed under SPR BIO-9 in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resources Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, project proponents will be required to identify significant infestations of invasive plant species (i.e., those rated as invasive by the California Invasive Plant Council or designated as noxious weeds by the California Department of Food and Agriculture) during reconnaissance-level surveys and target them for removal during treatment activities. Treatment methods will be selected based on the invasive species present and may include herbicide application, manual or mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, and/or herbivory, and they will be designed to maximize success in killing or removing the invasive plants and preventing reestablishment based on the life history characteristics of the invasive plant species present. Treatments will be focused on removing invasive plant species that cause ecological harm to native vegetation types, especially those that can alter fire cycles.

###### Comment A20-22

3. California State Park Campgrounds offer firewood which can be purchased by campers for their camping experience. There has been no comments nor discussion to use existing firewood – vegetation on site or close by instead of importing firewood hauled from other locations to a campground. Using firewood generated from the area close by where it is grown and being managed is one way of reducing vehicle haul emissions.

###### Response A20-22

Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR explains that vegetation removed during mechanical treatments may be disposed of by “cutting large woody material into lengths for firewood gatherers.”

###### Comment A20-23

4. The grown of vegetation following a wildfire can be exacerbated by the lack of vegetation management in the subsequent years as the land recovers. While a wildfire has, in many cases been devastating, there may be an opportunity to help keep an area that burned more fire resilient by learning how to manage vegetation. For those areas that have not had any vegetation management years following a wildfire, there is a great deal of work needed now to bring it back into a fire resilient landscape.

Prioritizing areas with past wildfires to evaluate them for future vegetation management is as critical as developing new areas to manage vegetation.

The Placer County Air Pollution Control District appreciates the opportunity to comment. Any questions on the comments can be directed to Yu‐Shuo Chang or Ann Hobbs of the District staff.

###### Response A20-23

The treatable landscape, discussed in Section 2.4, “Geographic Scope of the CalVTP – Treatable Landscape,” includes lands that have been (and will be) burned by wildfires. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

Letter A21 **University of California, Santa Cruz**

Traci Ferdolage, Associate Vice Chancellor

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A21-1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). The University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) understands that CAL FIRE intends to use the CalVTP in order to reduce wildfire risks and that this PEIR would be used to streamline the environmental review process for the program under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

As a responsible agency under CEQA, UCSC requests some additional clarification on the proposed treatment areas and treatment methods included in the program:

* Mapping Identifying Potential Treatment Areas and Environmental Review: It is our understanding that the statewide mapping that has been prepared for the CalVTP within CAL FIRE's State Responsibility Area (SRA) is based on vegetation formations that were appropriate for treatment throughout the State, which is at a very high level. We request clarification on whether treatment areas are limited to those areas modeled in the SRA or if other future treatment areas that are comprised of a treatable fuel type could be evaluated under this PEIR in order to reduce wildlife risk within University property (e.g. through a Supplemental EIR)?

###### Response A21-1

The PEIR analyzes impacts on resources within the treatable landscape, which is viewable online via the Board’s webpage. As stated in Section PD-3.2.1 of Appendix PD-3 in Volume II of this Final PEIR, a proposed later treatment project is within the scope of the PEIR when it meets all of the following qualifications:

* **Treatment Methods**. The proposed treatment methods are consistent with the treatment types and activities described in Chapter 2, “Program Description,” of the Draft PEIR.
* **Geographic Area**. The proposed treatment site is within the geographic limits of the CalVTP’s treatable landscape.
* **Environmental Impacts**. The environmental effects of the proposed treatment have been covered in the Draft PEIR, and none of the criteria for preparation of subsequent CEQA documentation are met (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15162).

If the later treatment project meets the above qualifications pertaining to treatment methods and environmental impacts, but the treatment area for a later treatment project extends beyond or is outside the CAL FIRE–identified treatable landscape, the project proponent could consider the provisions of State CEQA Guidelines Section 15163 (Supplement to an EIR) or Section 15162 (Addendum to an EIR), as well as the rule of reason and the facts of the circumstance, in determining whether the later vegetation treatment project may be covered within the scope of the PEIR.

###### Comment A21-2

* Herbicides for Vegetation Treatment: The CalVTP allows the use of the herbicides for vegetation treatment. The University of California has temporarily halted the use of the herbicide glyphosate on all UC campuses, which is identified as one of the herbicides that can be allowed as a treatment method. We request clarification on whether the University can prevent the use of glyphosates as a herbicidal vegetation treatment under this program?

Thank you for taking these comments into consideration into your environmental review process for the California Vegetation Treatment Program.

###### Response A21-2

The commenter may act as a project proponent using the CalVTP PEIR for CEQA coverage and would design any treatment project on its land according to its regulations and location-specific needs, selecting among the treatment types and activities identified in the CalVTP. Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the project development and implementation and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

Letter A22 **County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services**

Eric Lardy, AICP, Chief, Advance Planning Division

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A22-1

The County of San Diego (County) reviewed the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's (Board) Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the California Vegetation Treatment (CalVTP), received on June 24, 2019.

The County appreciates the opportunity to review the Project and offers the following comments for your consideration. Please note. that none of these comments should be construed as County support for this Project.

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

1. The County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) requires that the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection coordinate the implementation of the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) with the County, specifically, the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

2. There is high potential that the proposed treatment area within the County includes some of the thousands of acres of parkland currently owned and managed by DPR. Page 2-49 of the PEIR under section 2.8, “Potential Permits and Approvals Required,” does not include the approval and/or permits that DPR would require for CAL FIRE to implement the CalVTP on DPR lands. As the landowner, the County must authorize the implementation of the CalVTP on County lands.

###### Response A22-1

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A22-2

3. Paragraph one of Section 2.3.2 “Proposed CalVTP Implementation” states, “After approval, implementation of the CalVTP would consist of vegetation treatment activities carried out by CAL FIRE on private or public land, by public agencies and organizations funded by CAL FIRE grants, or potentially by public agencies that own land within the treatable landscape.” DPR requests that the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection make clear that implementing vegetation treatment activities on County owned land would be contingent on County approval.

###### Response A22-2

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A22-3

4. In addition to seeking authorization of implementing the CalVTP on DPR lands, DPR requests that CAL FIRE coordinate with the San Diego County Fire Authority on the implementation of this plan, including the placement of any fire breaks.

###### Response A22-3

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A22-4

5. DPR requires that implementation of the CalVTP on DPR land or DPR adjacent land is consistent with the County's Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) and with the MSCP Preserve Land requirements.

###### Response A22-4

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations. Refer also to response to comment O28-37 regarding consideration of local and regional conservation plans.

###### Comment A22-5

1. County-maintained public roadways and other facilities may be located within the proposed project area. Any pavement, curb/gutter/sidewalk, culverts, utilities, traffic control-related infrastructure, as well as any other infrastructure within the County-maintained road right-of-way that is damaged by the project shall be replaced to its original condition or better to the satisfaction of the County Department of Public Works.

###### Response A22-5

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A22-6

2. Any improvements or impacts to County-maintained roads must be conducted in accordance with the County's Pavement Cut Policy. Such activities may also require an encroachment permit and/or excavation permit with accompanied traffic control plan in consultation with the County. We request coordination with the County Department of Public Works prior to any modification of County-maintained facilities.

The County appreciates the opportunity to comment on this Project. We look forward to receiving future documents related to this Project and providing additional assistance, at your request. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact Timothy Vertino, Land Use / Environmental Planner, at (858) 495-5468, or via e-mail at timothy.vertino@sdcounty.ca.gov.

###### Response A22-6

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A22-7

The County of San Diego (County) reviewed the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's (Board) Notice of Preparation Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) California Vegetation Treatment (CalVTP), received on January 31, 2019.

The County appreciates the opportunity to review the Project and offers the following comments for your consideration. Please note that none of these comments should be construed as County support for this Project.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH**

The County's Department of Environmental Health Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) is certified by the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery to enforce State laws and regulations of solid waste activities throughout the unincorporated County pursuant to Public Resources Code (PRC) and Titles 14 and 27 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

According to the proposed Notice of Preparation of a PEIR for the proposed CalVTP, the implementation of vegetation treatments to reduce wildfire risks include Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fuel reduction, fuel breaks, and ecological restoration projects. As a potential responsible agency under the Statewide CalVTP, the LEA has the following comments:

1. It is unknown the type of treatment or processing that the vegetation would receive in the three proposed treatment categories. The organic (green) waste generated as a result of these treatments would still be considered feedstock for organic processing operations such as composting. Organic processing operations are subject to permitting and inspection by the LEA. Additionally, organic processing operations are subject to solid waste regulatory standards including pathogen reduction, metals and physical contaminants sampling. However, these solid waste standards do not include any chemicals of concern that would be part of a treatment that includes herbicides or flame retardants.

###### Response A22-7

The anticipated disposition of biomass from vegetation treatment is discussed under “Mechanical Vegetation Treatment” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. In addition, as discussed under SPR UTIL-1 in Section 2.7.13, “Public Services and Utilities Standard Project Requirements,” for projects requiring the disposal of material outside of the treatment area, the project proponent will prepare a Solid Organic Waste Disposition Plan prior to initiating treatment activities. The plan will identify the amount (e.g., tons) of solid organic waste to be managed on-site (i.e., scattering wood materials, generating unburned piles, and pile burning) and transported off-site for processing (i.e., at a biomass power plant, wood product processing facility, or composting facility). If the project proponent intends to transport solid organic waste off-site, the Solid Organic Waste Disposition Plan will clearly identify the location and capacity of the intended processing facility, consistent with local and state regulations, to demonstrate that adequate capacity exists to accept the treated materials.

###### Comment A22-8

2. Please note that organic waste generated from the proposed treatments must be properly managed, processed, or disposed, and handled in accordance with Title 14, California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3.1 – Handling of Compostable Materials. Please include a description and analysis for proposed management of generated organic materials from these treatments.

###### Response A22-8

Potential impacts related to biomass from vegetation treatments are addressed under Impact UTIL-3 in Section 3.16, “Public Services, Utilities, and Service Systems,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. SPR UTIL-1 in Section 2.7.13, “Public Services and Utilities Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR further addresses disposition of biomass in compliance with applicable regulations.

###### Comment A22-9

3. Please identify how infected vegetation such as trees infested with bark beetle will be managed/processed to prevent further spread of this pest or other pests.

###### Response A22-9

Best management practices for working at sites with plant pathogens, including bark beetle, are discussed under SPR BIO-6 in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resources Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. In addition, similar to SPR BIO-9 in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resources Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, biomass with infestations of pathogens would be treated on-site or off-site at an appropriate waste collection facility. Infested biomass would be transported in a closed container or bag to prevent the spread of pathogens during transport.

###### Comment A22-10

4. Please include the County of San Diego Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency on the interested parties list for future updates on this proposed PEIR.

County of San Diego
Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency
5500 Overland Avenue, Suite 11 O
San Diego, CA 92123

###### Response A22-10

The County of San Diego Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency has been added to the contact list for the CalVTP. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A22-11

**PARKS AND RECREATION**

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) recognizes the Project has the goal of reducing the potential for wildfires; however:

1. Please ensure that the CalVTP coordinates closely with local jurisdictions and land managers to ensure that all potential vegetation treatment methods are covered under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document.

The County appreciates the opportunity to comment on this Project. We look forward to receiving future documents related to this Project and providing additional assistance, at your request. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact Timothy Vertino, Land Use / Environmental Planner, at (858) 495-5468, or via e-mail at timothy.vertino@sdcounty.ca.gov.

###### Response A22-11

Refer to Master Response 4 regarding the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment projects and Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

Letter A23 **California Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Chad Dibble, Deputy Director, Ecosystem Conservation Division

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A23-1

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the public review draft of the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). CDFW submits its comments as a trustee and responsible agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). (Pub. Resources Code,§§ 21069, 21070; CEQA Guidelines,§§ 15381, 15386, subd. (a).) CDFW serves by statute as California's trustee agency for fish and wildlife and holds those resources in trust for all the people of the state. (Fish & G. Code,§ 711.7, subd. (a).) CDFW also has legal jurisdiction as trustee to conserve, protect, and manage fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species. (*Id*., § 1802.)

CDFW also provides the comments detailed below as a responsible agency because many of the CalVTP activities and treatments detailed in the PEIR are subject to CDFW's independent regulatory authority and will require a permit or other authorization from CDFW under the Fish and Game Code. This includes the notification and authorization requirements under CDFW's Lake and Streambed Program, and permitting under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). A robust analysis in the PEIR of the potentially significant environmental effects that the CalVTP may have on California fish and wildlife, and a detailed mitigation framework to address those effects will be essential to satisfy these future permitting requirements. Details regarding CDFW's regulatory authority and related permitting obligations are available on CDFW's web page (www.wildlife.ca.gov). Finally, CDFW provides the comments detailed below as a responsible agency because it owns land or has land management authority in the treatable landscape described in the PEIR.

CDFW would like to thank the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board), and the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) for consulting with and seeking input from CDFW during development of the draft PEIR. (See Pub. Resources Code,§ 21080.4.) California is grappling with a lengthening fire season and large, catastrophic fires that are increasing in size and frequency. In addition to the human consequences, ever more frequent catastrophic fires cause significant, adverse effects to fish and wildlife, including loss of individuals, loss or type conversion of habitat, disruption of landscape connectivity, and changes in ecosystem processes. CDFW recognizes the consequences of catastrophic fire and supports the need for California to minimize the related risks. We also believe California's fire prevention efforts can and should be carried out to avoid and minimize unnecessary adverse effects to fish and wildlife. Indeed, with careful planning, California fish and wildlife could benefit in some respects from these important efforts. CDFW appreciates that the Board and CAL FIRE share these interests, and we look forward to continued coordination.

CDFW, with its trustee mandate and responsible agency obligations, reviewed the draft PEIR with an eye to potentially significant effects to fish and wildlife, and potentially feasible mitigation measures and alternatives to address those effects. (Pub. Resources Code; § 21104, subd. (c); CEQA Guidelines, § 15086, subd. (c).) CDFW focused its review specifically on the Program Description in Chapter 2, the biological setting and impact analysis in Chapter 3.6, and the treatment-specific implementation framework described in various places in the PEIR, but most importantly in the Project-Specific Analysis included as Appendix PD-3. Consistent with our review, CDFW's comments detailed below broadly fall into two categories: (1) future project implementation and tracking, and (2) clarity of requirements and protection measures detailed in the PEIR, We offer our comments with an interest in meaningful public review and with the goal of helping the Board, CAL FIRE, and others to carry out this important effort.

###### Response A23-1

The summary of CDFW’s role as a trustee and responsible agency for the CalVTP and the focus of CDFW’s review regarding potential impacts on biological resources is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A23-2

**FUTURE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND TRACKING**

One of the Board's objectives identified in the PEIR is to substantially increase the pace and scale of vegetation treatments to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire. The PEIR, to this end, provides a programmatic level of detail focused on potentially significant effects and a statewide, but region and species-specific mitigation framework for vegetation treatments consistent with the PEIR. The Project-Specific Analysis included in Appendix PD-3 and the related checklist provide the essential roadmap to implement individual treatments under the CalVTP (hereafter, the PSA or Checklist), and related reporting requirements will help the Board, CAL FIRE, and the public to track the pace and scale of vegetation treatments described in the PEIR.

Discussion in the PEIR regarding substantive implementation of the CalVTP and use of the PSA Checklist would be improved with additional detail concerning the bulleted topics that follow.

* Additional detail regarding ongoing maintenance activities in connection with and following an individual treatment would improve the PEIR. CDFW agrees that maintenance activities will vary project to project, but it is not clear whether subsequent or ongoing maintenance will be addressed in the PSA Checklist as part of the review for an initial treatment. Likewise, even if ongoing maintenance following an individual treatment is addressed in the PSA Checklist for the initial treatment, it is not clear whether or in what circumstance subsequent changes in the landscape would make the initial Checklist no longer relevant to discretionary decisions concerning ongoing maintenance. Additional detail regarding maintenance following an initial treatment and the shelf-life of the completed Checklist for the initial treatment would improve the PEIR.

###### Response A23-2

Refer to Master Response 2 for an explanation of how maintenance will be considered in the environmental review process (i.e., the PSA) for proposed later vegetation treatment projects.

###### Comment A23-3

* The PSA Checklist includes reporting requirements that must be submitted to CAL FIRE before an individual treatment project, but there is no guidance regarding data collection and reporting after a treatment is completed. Project proponents should be required to submit a report to CAL FIRE within a reasonable time after an individual treatment is completed. Details regarding the substantive content and the process to submit a post-treatment report should be added to the Project Description or otherwise included in the CalVTP implementation framework. The Board should require the report to include basic facts about the specific treatment and post-treatment conditions, including dates of work, type and acreage of treatments, and a description of post-treatment vegetation and sensitive resources identified for protection. A required post-treatment report will help the Board and CAL FIRE compile relevant data and better understand post-treatment conditions at a statewide scaIe.

###### Response A23-3

In consideration of the commenter’s recommendation to require submittal of a report after a treatment is completed, SPR AD-7, which pertains to the terms of a landowner/land manager’s contract with CAL FIRE to implement vegetation treatment, was added. SPR AD-7 is presented in Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. SPR AD-7 requires a project proponent to provide basic information about the treatment to the Board or CAL FIRE after it is completed. These requirements were also added to the PSA instructions (see “Reporting Requirements” section in Section PD-3.2.4 in Appendix PD-3 of Final PEIR Volume II). Refer also to Master Response 6 regarding information that must be provided to the Board or CAL FIRE for proposed projects (prior to PSA completion), approved projects (after PSA completion), and completed projects.

###### Comment A23-4

***CLARIFYING SPECIFIC PROJECT REQUIREMENTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES***

Existing discussion in the PEIR regarding Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) and identified mitigation measures to address potentially significant effects on fish and wildlife would be improved with additional detail concerning the bulleted topics that follow.

* The PEIR should include an SPR to avoid potentially significant impacts to nesting birds. The PEIR identifies impacts to common nesting birds in Impact BIO-6 and provides a limited discussion of a few measures to prevent related effects. Absent a specific SPR that project proponents are required to implement in the field, however, these measures will not provide sufficient protection to nesting birds, chicks, and eggs during vulnerable periods of their lifecycle. The SPR should require biologically appropriate surveys based on habitat and time of year, and require additional avoidance and minimization measures for work that must be conducted during the nesting season.

###### Response A23-4

As described in Impact BIO-6 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, disturbances to breeding activities of common nesting birds and loss of nests are possible as a result of treatment activities implemented under the CalVTP. However, for the reasons described in detail in Impact BIO-6, including implementation of applicable SPRs designed to reduce or avoid impacts on sensitive and high-quality breeding habitats, the magnitude of these potential losses would not substantially reduce the overall abundance or availability of suitable breeding habitat for common nesting birds, because treatments would be implemented within relatively small portions of the extensive ranges of common bird species, and suitable habitat would remain available to these species across the broader landscape surrounding treatment areas. Therefore, the impact was determined to be less than significant. Specifically, SPRs designed to identify special-status species habitat (SPR BIO-1) and sensitive natural communities (SPR BIO-3), train workers to minimize disturbances to wildlife and sensitive habitats (SPR BIO-2), retain the habitat function and value of riparian habitat (SPR BIO-4), and avoid environmental effects of type conversion of chaparral and coastal sage scrub (SPR BIO-5) would avoid and minimize the likelihood of impacts on common nesting birds using these important habitats.

SPR BIO-12 has been incorporated into Section 2.7, “Standard Project Requirements,” and Impact BIO-6 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR in a good faith effort to require additional protection of common nesting birds in response to the issue raised by a trustee and responsible agency. Accordingly, Impact BIO-6 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been expanded to refer to this SPR. SPR BIO-12 requires avoiding implementation of treatments during the nesting season to the extent feasible, conducting biologically appropriate surveys for activities that must be performed during the nesting season, and implementing feasible impact avoidance strategies for active nests identified during surveys prior to treatment activities. Impact avoidance strategies contained in the SPR for treatment activities during the nesting season may include establishment of a buffer, modification of treatment, deferral of treatment, monitoring of active raptor nests, and retention of raptor nest trees.

This SPR requires that feasible actions will be taken by the project proponent to avoid loss of common native bird nests. The feasibility of implementing the avoidance strategies will be determined by the project proponent based on whether implementation of this SPR will preclude completing the treatment project within the reasonable period of time necessary to meet CalVTP program objectives, including, but not limited to, protection of vulnerable communities. Considerations may include limitations on the presence of environmental and meteorological conditions necessary to execute treatment prescriptions (e.g., the limited seasonal windows during which prescribed burning can occur when vegetation moisture, weather, wind, and other physical conditions are suitable). If it is infeasible to avoid loss of common bird nests (not including raptor nests), the project proponent will document the reasons why implementation of the avoidance strategies is infeasible.

As described above, this SPR requires that feasible actions will be taken by the project proponent to avoid loss of common native bird nests. The conclusion of Impact BIO-6 was already a determination of less than significant, so it does not rely on SPR BIO-12 for the less-than-significant outcome. In coordination with CDFW, the Board incorporated this SPR into the PEIR in response to the request of a trustee and responsible agency; its inclusion does not change the analysis or conclusions of the PEIR.

###### Comment A23-5

* The PEIR contains four biological mitigation measures (BIO-1 c, BIO-2c, BIO-3b, and BIO-3c) that require a Compensatory Mitigation Plan. Language should be added advising project proponents to consult with CDFW and/or any other applicable responsible agency prior to finalizing any Compensatory Mitigation Plan in order to ensure that it will also satisfy that responsible agency's permitting requirements.

###### Response A23-5

Mitigation Measure BIO-1c (Impact BIO-1 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR) and Mitigation Measures BIO-2c, BIO-3b, and BIO-3c (Impact BIO-2 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II) have been revised to clarify that project proponents will consult with CDFW and/or any other applicable responsible agency prior to finalizing the Compensatory Mitigation Plan in order to ensure that it will also satisfy that responsible agency’s regulatory requirements.

###### Comment A23-6

* The PEIR should add more specific detail governing the application of certain SPRs and mitigation measures. For example, Mitigation Measure BI0-3a states: “To the extent feasible, no fuel breaks will be created in sensitive natural communities with rarity ranks of S1 (critically imperiled) and S2 (imperiled).” This measure should identify the specific scientifically based parameters governing fuel break feasibility determinations for individual treatments, including where special status species or other biologically sensitive resources may be present. The same parameters and required explanation for treatment-specific fuel break feasibility determinations should also be. included in the PSA Checklist, particularly where a project proponent determines a fuel break is necessary in a sensitive natural community. Finally, to the extent a potentially significant impact to special status species or a sensitive natural community will result from a fuel break, the Board should consider the feasibility of and the parameters governing required compensatory mitigation.

###### Response A23-6

The following text has been added to Mitigation Measure BIO-3a to inform the determination of feasibility by the project proponent: “The feasibility of implementing the avoidance measures will be determined by the project proponent based on whether implementation of this mitigation measure will preclude completing the treatment project within the reasonable period of time necessary to meet CalVTP program objectives, including, but not limited to, protection of vulnerable communities.”

If the avoidance measures are determined by the project proponent to be infeasible, the project proponent will document the reasons why implementation of the avoidance strategies is infeasible in the PSA. After completion of the PSA and prior to or during treatment implementation, if there is any change in the feasibility of avoidance strategies from those explained in the PSA, this will be documented in the post project implementation report (referred to by CAL FIRE as a Completion Report). The required content for a Completion Report is identified in SPR AD-7 (refer to Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR) and Section PD-3.2.4, “Project Specific Analysis,” in Appendix PD-3 in Volume II of this Final PEIR). Refer also to Master Response 6 regarding the collection and submittal of information on completed projects, which would include any explanation for buffer reductions during implementation of mitigation measures.

Mitigation Measure BIO-3a requires that project proponents evaluate residual impacts on sensitive natural communities after treatment design and applicable impact minimization measures are implemented and determine whether habitat functions would be maintained. If the project proponent determines that the loss or degradation of sensitive natural communities or oak woodlands would be significant under CEQA after implementing feasible treatment design alternatives and impact minimization measures, then compensatory mitigation for loss of habitat function would be required through Mitigation Measure BIO-3b. Mitigation Measures BIO-1a, BIO-1b, and BIO-1c would require avoidance of special-status plant occurrences, which would be identified and delineated under SPRs BIO-1 and BIO-7, with physical buffers or seasonal restrictions, and would require compensation for unavoidable losses of special-status plants. Mitigation Measures BIO-3a, BIO-3b, and BIO-3c would require project proponents to avoid or offset the loss of the habitat function of special-status wildlife habitat (i.e., sensitive natural communities). Mitigation Measures BIO-2a, BIO-2b, BIO-2c, BIO-2d, BIO-2e, BIO-2f, and BIO-2g require identification and avoidance of special-status wildlife species and/or their habitat or compensation for unavoidable mortality, injury, or disturbance and loss of habitat function for special-status wildlife. These measures apply to fuel break treatments, as well as other treatment types.

###### Comment A23-7

Similarly, Mitigation Measures BIO-1a and BIO-2b state that “no-disturbance buffers will generally be a minimum of 50 feet from listed plants” and “will generally be a minimum of 100 feet” for special status wildlife. Both measures specifically allow for smaller or larger buffers if a qualified individual determines that the buffer size would adequately protect against potentially significant impacts to the species. CDFW appreciates a single buffer size for all special status or listed plants and animals is not biologically sound. Site-specific details including topography, habitat type, species, and the specific treatment activity, to name a few, should be considered when making treatment-specific determinations about an appropriate buffer. At a minimum, if a qualified individual determines that a buffer will be smaller than the general minimum prescribed in these measures, a scientifically based treatment­specific explanation for that determination should be required in the PSA Checklist.

###### Response A23-7

Mitigation Measure BIO-1a (Impact BIO-1 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR) and Mitigation Measure BIO-2b (Impact BIO-2 in Section 3.6.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” in Volume II) have been revised to clarify that if a no-disturbance buffer is reduced below a stated minimum distance, a qualified RPF or biologist or botanist will provide the project proponent with a site- and/or treatment activity-specific explanation for the buffer reduction, which will be included in the PSA. Additionally, if during treatment implementation there is any deviation from the reduced buffer as explained in the PSA, this will be documented in the post project implementation report (referred to by CAL FIRE as a Completion Report).

The required content for a Completion Report is identified in SPR AD-7 (refer to Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR) and Section PD-3.2.4, “Project Specific Analysis,” in Appendix PD-3 in Volume II). Refer also to Master Response 6 regarding the collection and submittal of information on completed projects, which would include any explanation for buffer reductions during implementation of mitigation measures.

###### Comment A23-8

As another example, SPR BIO-4 states that the removal of large, native riparian hardwood trees will be minimized to the extent feasible. The same measure notes that the tree size retention parameter will be determined on a site-specific basis, depending on the vegetation present at the project site. Instead, this SPR would be improved with the inclusion of a minimum diameter at breast height limit, but with flexibility to remove larger trees. A scientifically based project-specific explanation substantiating the basis to remove larger trees should be required in the PSA Checklist. This will allow for site-specific flexibility, while directly encouraging the retention of larger native riparian hardwoods. This is similar to other Board regulations and exemptions where a standard is set but deviations from that standard are allowed with a scientifically based written justification.

###### Response A23-8

Because of the wide range of variability in average tree size for different riparian vegetation types and stages, it is difficult to set a “one size fits all” minimum size threshold that is meaningful for a statewide vegetation treatment program. For example, what constitutes a large tree in a valley oak woodland or sycamore alluvial woodland is very different from what would be considered large in a red willow thicket or shining willow grove. The text of SPR BIO-4 has been revised to require that a scientifically-based, project-specific explanation substantiating the retention size parameter for native riparian hardwood tree removal be provided in the PSA.

###### Comment A23-9

* CDFW, in general, supports the requirement in SPR-AD3 that individual treatment projects be consistent with local plans, policies, and ordinances. We recommend, however, that the SPR include more specific detail regarding local Community Wildfire Prevention Plans. Required consistency with these plans can help ensure that specific treatment activities account for any local variations in fire regime. Doing so will also require consideration of and promote consistency with local priorities and strategies, and consistency with already identified local strategies to effectively address fuels management and reduce wildfire impacts.

###### Response A23-9

It has been standard practice to define treatment projects with full consideration of local fire safe planning. To clarify this, and as recommended by the commenter, SPR AD-3 has been revised to state that CWPPs, as well as CAL FIRE Unit Plans, will be considered to the extent they are applicable to a treatment project (refer to Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR).

As stated on preventwildfireca.org, “Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) enable communities to plan how they will reduce the risk of wildfire. Plans identify strategic sites and methods for fuel reduction projects across the landscape and jurisdictional boundaries” (CWCG 2019). Examples illustrating the purpose of and collaborative efforts involved in development of a CWPP are presented below.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Fire Department (Metro Fire) CWPP (Sacramento Metropolitan Fire 2012) “focuses on the following concepts to improve the resiliency of Metro Fire’s communities to wildfire:

* Identification of Community Wildfire Risk
* Delineation of a Wildland Urban Interface
* Vegetation Best Management Practices
* Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) Education
* Stakeholder Interaction and Involvement.”

Throughout 2013 and 2014, community stakeholders that participated in planning the CWPP alongside Metro Fire included:

* Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks,
* CAL FIRE,
* U.S. Bureau of Land Management,
* homeowner’s associations,
* City of Citrus Heights,
* City of Rancho Cordova,
* American River Parkway Association,
* various public agencies, and
* other community organizations.

Marin County’s CWPP (Marin County Fire Department 2016) provides a scientifically based assessment of wildfire threat in the WUI of Marin County. It was developed through a collaborative process involving Marin County fire agencies; county officials; county, state, and federal land management agencies; and community members. It meets the CWPP requirements set forth in the federal Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which include:

* collaborating with stakeholders,
* identifying and prioritizing areas for fuel reduction activities, and
* addressing structural ignitability.

The various stakeholders identified within the plan include public, private, and volunteer fire agencies and associations, as well as other land management agencies, private groups, foundations, and homeowners.

Likewise, Humboldt County’s CWPP (County of Humboldt 2019) is intended to inspire and guide actions that will help mitigate the potential for wildfire loss in all vulnerable communities within the boundaries of Humboldt County. The plan is generally updated every 5 years, and in order to be certified, it must meet the standards of a CWPP under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act Opens a New Window. The following goals are identified in Humboldt County’s CWPP:

* wildfire ignition prevention,
* wildfire preparedness,
* disaster preparedness,
* fire protection,
* restoration of beneficial use, and
* integrated planning.

CWPPs are developed through collaboration with multiple entities to tie together mutual interests in community protection. Public agency stakeholders in a CWPP may be project proponents under the CalVTP for implementing projects intended to accomplish the goals identified in a CWPP. CWPPs, CAL FIRE Unit Plans, and other local fire safe planning are important sources of information when developing treatment projects for implementation.

###### Comment A23-10

* Currently, the PEIR only prescribes a timeline for habitat assessments and related details are not clear. The PEIR allows for habitat assessments older than one year, for example, if they can be “demonstrated” to remain valid. Further detail regarding the sideboards governing (e.g., unchanged site conditions) and how the validity of reconnaissance-level surveys, data review, and habitat assessments that are older than one year will be demonstrated should be addressed in the PSA Checklist.

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the CalVTP PEIR and we look forward to our continued work with the Board, CAL FIRE, and our shared partners on this and similar efforts. If you have any questions regarding this letter or further coordination, please contact Ms. Isabel Baer, Environmental Program Manager, at (916) 651-3110, or isabel.baer@wildlife.ca.gov.

###### Response A23-10

SPR BIO-1 in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resource Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR has been revised to require that data review and reconnaissance-level surveys will occur no more than 1 year prior to the submittal of the PSA. In addition, further clarification has been added to SPR BIO-1 regarding how to determine when a habitat assessment older than 1 year is valid. The instructions for completing the biological resources discussion of the PSA for later vegetation treatment (refer to Section PD-3.7.1, “Discussion,” and biological resources checklist in Appendix PD-3 of Volume II of this Final PEIR) have been revised to include the provision of an explanation regarding the validity of the habitat assessment older than 1 year.

Letter A24 **California Coastal Commission**

Madeline Cavalieri, Statewide Planning Manager

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A24-1

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the June 24, 2019 Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (Draft PEIR) for the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) which directs the implementation of vegetation treatments as part of the State’s ongoing efforts to prevent catastrophic wildfires in California. We particularly appreciate the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (BOF) and CalFIRE’s coordination with our staff to discuss and consider the CalVTP in the coastal zone. These coordination efforts have given us a better understanding of both the program itself and its administration within the coastal zone. We recognize that the CalVTP approach allows for the design of individual vegetation treatment projects on a case-by-case basis (within the parameters of the defined program activities) to efficiently address fire hazards and minimize impacts to resources. In addition, the programmatic approach recognizes that all necessary permits must be obtained from appropriate regulatory authorities, including coastal development permits (CDPs) for projects in the coastal zone.

The Coastal Act regulates the use of land and water within the coastal zone and applies a broad definition of “development,” which includes vegetation treatment activities proposed in the CalVTP. CDPs are discretionary permits that evaluate a proposed development’s consistency with the Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act or, where certified by the Coastal Commission, a local government’s Local Coastal Program (LCP). CDPs ensure that development in the coastal zone is carried out in accordance with coastal protection policies and are issued by local governments with certified LCPs, or by the Coastal Commission for areas with no certified LCP and in areas of the Commission’s retained jurisdiction.

Under the California Coastal Act (Public Resources Code § 30000 et seq.), the Commission is charged with ensuring the protection of coastal resources, which includes but is not limited to the protection of sensitive habitats and species (known under the Coastal Act as “environmentally sensitive habitat areas,” or ESHA), visual resources, coastal water bodies and wetlands, coastal agriculture, visitor-serving land uses, natural landforms, and public access and recreation. In addition, the Coastal Act requires new development to be sited and designed to minimize risk from fire hazards.

Fire is a natural phenomenon that habitats in California have experienced for millennia, and tree ring research shows that different habitats in California have adapted to specific fire frequencies and regimes. Prior to modern times, the main cause of fire was lightning. In the last century, however, approximately 90% of fires have been caused by human activity. During this time, large areas of California have been developed, and fires that threaten development have been suppressed such that some natural habitats adjacent to development have become unhealthy and contain dead and diseased vegetation. In the last several decades, there has been an increase in the size, intensity, and frequency of fires that are primarily attributed to the concomitant effects of fire suppression and climate change. More frequent and hotter fires can have devastating impacts to natural habitats including by causing habitat conversion and invasion by non-natives.

Commission staff supports CalVTP activities within the coastal zone that reduce risk to life and property, allow for regeneration of habitat, and are administered in a way that is most protective of the ecosystem. In addition to ESHA present in the Ecological Restoration areas that are mapped in Figure 2-9, ESHA may also be present within the mapped Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and Fuel Break areas as shown on Figures 2-4 and 2-7. Where ESHA is present, only certain treatment activities would be appropriate, given that the Coastal Act provides a very high standard of protection for ESHA. However, where ESHA is not present, multiple treatment activities may be appropriate. We note that the CalVTP appears to be designed to maximize flexibility of designing each individual vegetation treatment project to meet on the ground circumstances. In the coastal zone, these projects must be designed to moderate fire hazards in a manner that is also consistent with protection of coastal resources pursuant to the Coastal Act, including avoiding significant disruption to habitat values of ESHA.

###### Response A24-1

The summary of the California Coastal Act and potential treatments that may be appropriate in ESHAs and outside of ESHAs is noted. The commenter’s expression of support for CalVTP treatments within the coastal zone that reduce risk to life and property, allow for regeneration of habitat, and are administered in a way that is most protective of the ecosystem will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A24-2

We understand that the CalVTP PEIR is intended to streamline the CEQA review process by analyzing the individual and cumulative environmental effects of proposed treatment types and activities on a programmatic level, and by identifying a suite of mitigation measures that must be applied to individual projects to avoid or minimize those impacts. Each project undertaken as part of the CalVTP would require a Project Specific Analysis (PSA) to make a determination as to whether a particular project is within the scope of the PEIR or not. Future activities found to be “within the scope” of the PEIR would not require additional CEQA review. However, as we have previously discussed, a “within the scope” determination would not obviate the need for the project proponent to obtain a CDP for treatments within the coastal zone.

The CalVTP Draft PEIR includes a list of Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) that would be incorporated into all proposed vegetation treatments under the program. SPRs appear to be intended to ensure that projects avoid and minimize environmental impacts and comply with applicable laws and regulations. Generally, the SPRs provide a framework to identify resources that may be impacted by a proposed vegetation treatment, apply mitigation measures and best management practices, and direct project proponents to relevant federal, state, or local regulatory bodies that may have authority to apply additional protectionary provisions. Given the unique nature of the coastal zone and coastal resources, as well as the unique authority which the Coastal Act provides to the Commission with respect to protection of the coastal zone and coastal resources, it is important that each project proponent coordinate with Commission staff prior to finalizing the design of a vegetation treatment within the coastal zone, as there may be additional resource protections based on the Coastal Act or certified LCP, as applicable, that apply to the project. For this reason, we recommend a separate SPR, specific to the coastal zone, which clarifies that project proponents should coordinate with Coastal Commission staff and design projects consistent with the Coastal Act or relevant LCP, as applicable (see Item #1 below). We also suggest changes to SPR BIO-8 and Appendix PD-3, as follows:

###### Response A24-2

The Board acknowledges and agrees that a “within-the-scope” determination would not obviate the need for the project proponent to obtain a CDP when it is required for treatments within the coastal zone. A completed PSA for a within-the-scope project is intended to provide the necessary environmental documentation under CEQA to support the issuance of a CDP, in coordination with the Coastal Commission. Refer to responses to comments A24-3 and A24-4 for specific responses to the topics identified in this comment.

###### Comment A24-3

1. For all treatment types and treatment activities that will be implemented in the coastal zone, we suggest providing for a new SPR applicable to carrying out the VTP consistent with the Coastal Act, or where applicable, certified LCPs, such as the following:

SPR Coastal Zone-1: Obtain a Coastal Development Permit for Proposed Treatment Within the Coastal Zone Where Required. When planning a treatment project within the Coastal Zone, the project proponent will contact the local Coastal Commission district office to determine if the area is within the jurisdiction of the Coastal Commission, or a local government with a certified Local Coastal Program (LCP). All treatment projects in the Coastal Zone will be reviewed as to whether a Coastal Development Permit (CDP) is required and will be designed to meet the following conditions:

i. In designing the treatment, priority will be given to activities and methods that avoid, minimize, and lastly – if avoidance is not possible – mitigate for impacts to coastal resources;

ii. The treatment activity will be designed in compliance with the Coastal Act, specifically Chapter 3 provisions (PRC, Section 30200 – 30265.5), which provide substantive standards for the protection of coastal resources, if the treatment activity will occur within the original jurisdiction of the Commission or an area of a local coastal government without a certified LCP;

iii. The treatment activity will be designed in compliance with the provisions of the certified LCP, specifically the substantive standards for the protection of coastal resources, if the treatment activity will occur within the jurisdiction of a local coastal government with a certified LCP;

This SPR applies to all treatment activities and all treatment types.

###### Response A24-3

A new SPR that requires a project proponent to obtain a CDP for a proposed treatment within the coastal zone, when a permit is required, has been added to the PEIR, as requested by the commenter (see new SPR AD-9 in Section 2.7.1, “Administrative Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. This SPR is also referenced under Impact LU-1 in Section 3.12.3, “Impact Analysis and Mitigation Measures,” because implementation of this SPR would avoid conflict with the California Coastal Act and a certified LCP (as applicable). Some of the provisions suggested by the commenter were modified when they were added to the PEIR to align the provisions with compliance requirements consistent with those placed on other project types. For example, the project proponent can determine whether the proposed project is within the jurisdiction of the California Coastal Commission or of a local government with a certified LCP without contacting a local Coastal Commission district office. In comparison to the text offered by the commenter, the new SPR AD-9 also clarifies that the conditions identified are applicable if a CDP is required.

###### Comment A24-4

2. For Appendix PD-3 (Project Specific Analysis), which serves as a checklist for CalFIRE and other project proponents to evaluate whether their vegetation treatment project qualifies as within the scope of this Draft PEIR or requires additional environmental review, we suggest including the California Coastal Commission, or local government with a certified LCP, under item 12, Other public agencies whose approval is required. The addition of the Commission (and local government with a certified LCP) as a separate entity to check off will prompt project proponents to identify whether their proposed vegetation treatment is in the coastal zone and requires a coastal development permit before implementing any treatment activities. We suggest a separate checkbox on the Environmental Checklist similar to:

* If the proposed treatment is within the coastal zone, has a coastal development permit been applied for or obtained from the Coastal Commission or local government with a certified LCP, as applicable? (Please specify.)

###### Response A24-4

The checkbox and associated text suggested by the commenter have been added to the environmental checklist in Section PD-3.2.4, “Project-Specific Analysis,” in Appendix PD-3 of Volume II of this Final PEIR.

###### Comment A24-5

3. Finally, for Standard Project Requirement (SPR) BIO-8, we suggest adding a condition to ensure that treatment activities are designed in a way that prioritizes avoidance of impacts to ESHA over mitigation, as required by the Coastal Act. This will help ensure that projects that are located in coastal zone ESHA are developed in a way that is sensitive to Coastal Act or LCP requirements, as applicable. We also suggest allowing for removal of diseased trees as part of ecological restoration projects in coastal zone ESHAs, as well as other minor modifications. Our suggested revisions to SPR BIO-8 are shown below:

**SPR BIO-8: Identify and Minimize Impacts in Coastal Zone ESHAs.** When planning a treatment project within the Coastal Zone, the project proponent will, **in consultation with the Coastal Commission or a local government with a certified LCP (as applicable),** identify the habitat types and species present to determine if the area qualifies as an Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA). All treatment projects in the Coastal Zone would require a coastal development permit (CDP) pursuant to the Coastal Act, regardless of whether **~~it~~ the habitat within the project location** qualifies as an ESHA. If the area is an ESHA, the ecological restoration treatment type may be allowed pursuant to this PEIR, if it meets the following conditions,**~~; however, a CDP may modify these conditions~~ subject to approval of a CDP by the Coastal Commission or a local government with a certified LCP (as applicable), approval which may result in modification to these conditions:**

* The treatment will be designed, in compliance with the Coastal Act **~~and~~ or** Local Coastal Program (LCP) where applicable, if a site is within a certified **~~plan~~ LCP** area, to improve the habitat function of the affected ESHA, improve habitat values, and prevent loss or type conversion of habitat and vegetation types that define the ESHA, or loss of special-status species that inhabit the ESHA.
* Treatment actions will be limited to eradication or control of invasive plants, removal of uncharacteristic fuel loads (e.g., removing dead**, diseased,** or dying vegetation), trimming/limbing of woody species as necessary to reduce ladder fuels, and select thinning of vegetation to restore densities that are characteristic of healthy stands of the vegetation types present in the ESHA.
* A qualified biologist or RPF familiar with the ecology of the treatment area will monitor all treatment activities in ESHAs.
* Appropriate no-disturbance buffers will be developed in compliance with the **Coastal Act or** relevant LCP policies for treatment activities in the vicinity of ESHAs to avoid adverse direct and indirect effects to ESHAs.
* **In designing the treatment, priority will be given to activities and methods that avoid, minimize, and lastly – if avoidance is not possible–mitigate for impacts to ESHA.**

This SPR applies to all treatment activities and only the ecosystem restoration treatment type. **Note that SPR Coastal Zone-1 applies to all treatment activities and all treatment types.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft PEIR. We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to continuing our collaboration. If you have any questions or would like to discuss these comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at (831) 427-4890.

###### Response A24-5

Most of the commenter’s suggested revisions to SPR BIO-8 have been incorporated (see Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resources Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR. However, the additional revisions to SPR BIO-8 remove redundancy with SPR AD-9, which requires compliance with the Coastal Act, and expand its application to all treatment activities and all treatment types, including treatment maintenance in compliance with the conditions listed in SPR BIO-9.

Letter A25 **County of Sonoma, Office of the County Administrator**

Michael Gossman, Deputy County Administrator – Office of Recovery and Resiliency

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A25-1

The County of Sonoma, through the Office of Recovery & Resiliency, appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) (State Clearinghouse # 2019012052).

As our local communities continue to recover and rebuild from the deadly and devastating October 2017 wildfires, we are pursuing ambitious fire prevention, preparedness and resilience measures outlined in our Recovery & Resiliency Framework adopted by our Board of Supervisors in December 2018 (https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Office-of-Recovery-and-Resiliency/Recovery-Framework/). The California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention (CAL FIRE) is one of several State agencies actively serving, supporting, and partnering with public and private entities to assist Sonoma County in moving towards our envisioned future. We greatly appreciate CAL FIRE’s ongoing efforts and activities in Sonoma County. In particular, the efforts of CAL FIRE are relevant to achieving our Natural Resources Goal #1:

*Reduce fuel loads in forests, woodlands and shrub lands strategically to lower wildfire hazards to communities and sensitive habitats, improve delivery of resources and amenities people need, and move forests on a trajectory of increased resistance to drought, disease, and insects.*

CAL FIRE pre-fire programs and actions are particularly vital to fire prevention and community protection in Sonoma County since the State Responsibility Area (SRA) covers 1,239 square miles of the 1,454 square miles of unincorporated lands. The SRA represents 85.2 percent of Sonoma County’s unincorporated lands and is home to 40.5 percent of our population.

Therefore, we want to express our support for the intended outcomes of the proposed program of vegetation treatments, as part of a multi-faceted approach to reduce the risk of loss of lives, property damage, costly fire suppression, and detrimental environmental and human health effects of catastrophic wildfires.

The attached preliminary comments include both general and specific comments on the CalVTP PEIR regarding possible adjustments we feel could improve the likelihood of cost-effective, timely implementation of urgently needed fuels reduction and fuel breaks without unnecessary environmental consequences or undue burdens on CAL FIRE, their grantees, or other potential project proponents.

The PEIR and its related appendices are voluminous and complex, making it difficult to adequately review and comment within the advertised public comment period. We would appreciate the opportunity to provide additional input and respectfully request that the comment period be extended for an additional 30 days.

Thank you for your consideration of the County’s comments. If you have questions or require additional information, please contact Virginia Mahacek, Natural Resources/Watershed Coordinator, at (707) 565-1739 or virginia.mahacek@sonoma-county.org.

###### Response A25-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP. The comment refers to detailed comments attached to the comment letter. See responses to comments A25-2 through A25-19.

###### Comment A25-2

The following comments are provided on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) (State Clearinghouse # 2019012052) to the Board of Forestry by the County of Sonoma, through its Office of Recovery & Resiliency, as an attachment to our cover letter dated August 9, 2019.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES-1, Paragraph 1 and ES-2 Paragraph 2 | Applicability of the PEIR | We are pleased with the intent to facilitate use of the PEIR for CEQA compliance by local, regional and state agencies with land ownership or land management responsibilities in the SRA implementing proposed CalVTP treatments. |

###### Response A25-2

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A25-3

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES‐2 | Program Objectives | Each of the stated program objectives have unquestionable merit, but the programs’ full list of objectives may be so broad that they include competing needs. Providing prioritization, ranking, or proportional commitment of effort/outcome as part of the program description would improve the basis for weighing potential impacts in the alternatives evaluation. |

###### Response A25-3

The comment is directed toward implementation of the CalVTP and does not address the content, analysis, or conclusions in the Draft PEIR. Therefore, no further response is warranted.

###### Comment A25-4

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES-3 | Treatable Landscape | It would be useful to include a hyperlink to the on‐line viewable treatable landscape and treatment type maps within the body of the document.  |

###### Response A25-4

Refer to Master Response 5 regarding public notification of later treatment activities.

###### Comment A25-5

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES-3 | Treatable Landscape | Please clarify how excluding agricultural CWHR vegetation types is consistent with the discussion of working lands under the stated program objectives. |

###### Response A25-5

As discussed under “Fuel Types” in Section 2.4.1, “Geographic Scope of the CalVTP – Treatable Landscape,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, agricultural California Wildlife Habitat Relationships vegetation types were excluded because agricultural land is generally outside the SRA. Working lands include working forests and other managed lands that are not zoned for agricultural use.

###### Comment A25-6

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES-3 | Proposed Treatments | The treatment target acreage is ambitious and a large increase relative to prior years. However, it is an extremely small percentage of the treatable landscape and it is not clear whether acreage targets by treatment type (and by inference, program objectives) would be applied in making program decisions on an annual basis or over the life of the program.  |

###### Response A25-6

The relative distribution of treatment activities provided in Section 2.5.3, “Distribution of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR is an approximate estimate of reasonably foreseeable expectations for treatments annually and over the life of the program. The percentages are not meant to be targets that the program would aim to achieve, but what is reasonably foreseeable based on historic treatments. Refer to Master Response 4 for additional detail on the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment project.

###### Comment A25-7

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES-3 | Treatment Activities | For improved clarity in connection to the potential impacts and mitigation requirements, it may be prudent to list pile burning, conservation burning, and other forms of biomass removal associated with mechanical or manual treatment as a distinct category of treatment ‘activity’, or as a sub set of those other two treatments rather than as part of ‘prescribed burning’. |

###### Response A25-7

As discussed under Impact TRAN-1 in Section 3.15, “Transportation,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the vegetative debris produced by mechanical or manual treatments also may be processed into several products: electricity, soil additives and amendments, engineered/composite wood, firewood, paper, densified wood, and potentially biofuels. This could result in additional haul truck trips to processing facilities. Mitigation measures will be applied to a treatment based on the impact that would occur rather than the treatment activity type. Because not all pile burning and broadcast burning have similar types of impacts, they are discussed together as applicable throughout the PEIR.

###### Comment A25-8

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES-4 | Standard Project Requirements | The intent of the Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) (described further in section 2.7) to provide consistent predictable environmental protections is understood and appreciated. However, they are extensive and may have complex interrelationships with each other and additional mitigation and permit requirements. Would it be possible to provide any filtering of potential projects by WHR unit or eco‐region to simplify the SPR requirements? |

###### Response A25-8

The SPRs and mitigation measures are connected to the type of impact occurring and would apply to more than one ecoregion. The SPR’s applicability to each of the treatment types is identified in each SPR. In addition, Appendix C in Volume II of this Final PEIR provides a checklist of all the SPRs and mitigation measures that can be used, to identify the applicability of each to the proposed treatment.

###### Comment A25-9

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES‐7 | Intended Uses of This EIR | It seems that the effort to facilitate coverage of ‘most’ potential vegetation treatment projects in one review and delivery system may actually subject some low impact, large benefit projects to additional financial or schedule burdens. Would it be possible to more explicitly identify a compliance route for projects based on their benefits and impacts? Perhaps a screening matrix similar to the concept illustrated in the figure below could be used to sort projects into more than just two possible pathways (within vs outside the scope). While project specific analysis would still be needed at some level of detail, a couple of the resulting pathways (on the low impact side) could be advanced with lower cost, schedule, and coordination burdens. In contrast, projects falling in the high impact, small benefit zone could be diverted from the program for stand‐alone consideration. For example, we provide this Conceptual Project Screening Matrix for your consideration: |



Figure 1: Conceptual Project Screening Matrix

###### Response A25-9

Completion of a PSA for each treatment activity is necessary to determine whether the environmental effects of the activity are covered within the scope of this Final PEIR pursuant to Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines. Later activities with fewer impacts will inherently have lower costs and more streamlined implementation processes.

###### Comment A25-10

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES‐7 | Intended Uses of This EIR | Archaeologic Survey requirements are an example of an SPR that could be modified if a screening system was used to elevate some potential projects that meet a ‘little or no impact’ into a Fast Pass zone. For example, “SPR CUL‐4 Archaeological Surveys” (described on page 2‐34) requires that archaeological field surveys be performed for all treatment activities and types. The expense of hiring an archaeologist to perform field surveys could be a barrier to project proponents and may be unnecessary if pre‐field research and Native American consultation under AB 52 do not reveal potential for resources to be present in the project area. |

###### Response A25-10

As discussed under SPR CUL-3 in Section 2.7.4, “Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resource Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, the survey methodology (e.g., pedestrian survey, subsurface investigation) depends on whether the area has a low, moderate, or high sensitivity for resources, which is based on whether the records search, prefield research, and/or Native American consultation identifies archaeological, historical, or tribal cultural resources near or within the treatment area. Pedestrian surveys and subsurface investigations are two examples of survey types. Areas with a low sensitivity for cultural resources would require a less intensive survey than areas with moderate or high sensitivity for cultural resources.

###### Comment A25-11

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES‐7 | Intended Uses of This EIR | A few of the treatment types, at least if they are the primary activity of a project, may be low impact. Some of the SPRs may unduly increase the expense and/or reduce the practicality of conducting some treatments. For example, SPR GEO‐1 Suspend Disturbance during Heavy Precipitation (described on page 2‐42) requires that prescribed herbivory be suspended when the National Weather Service forecast includes a 30 percent or more chance of rain within the next 24 hours. While heavy rain could lead to erosion in areas that are overgrazed, light rain in areas that are grazed to target fuels reduction is unlikely to result in significant erosion or sediment delivery to adjacent waterways. It may be useful to specify an amount/intensity threshold of forecasted precipitation, minimum distance to jurisdictional waterway, or slope categories to narrow the application of this requirement. |

###### Response A25-11

See response to comment A7-13 regarding suspending prescribed herbivory during heavy precipitation as described under SPR GEO-1.

###### Comment A25-12

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES‐7 | Intended Uses of This EIR | Please clarify whether CAL FIRE will eventually require all of their grant recipients to conform to this program and rely on this CEQA approval as a condition of receiving funds. If so, the need to have a program that accelerates large benefit/low impact projects, filters the SPR requirements, or otherwise streamlines the burden of costly studies and analyses is even more crucial.  |

###### Response A25-12

As discussed in Section 1.5.2, “Responsible and Trustee Agencies,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, there are many local, regional, and state agencies with land ownership or land management responsibilities on public land within the treatable landscape that seek to reduce wildfire risk and would carry out vegetation treatments under the CalVTP. As further discussed in Section 2.3.2, “Proposed CalVTP Implementation,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, this streamlined CEQA review process would reduce the need for staff effort and time for approval of individual treatment projects, while incorporating consistent standards of environmental protection, thereby allowing CAL FIRE and other state, regional, and local landowners to treat more acres each year than are currently treated. While the PEIR is intended to provide streamlined CEQA review for later treatments, participation in the CalVTP is not mandatory.

###### Comment A25-13

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ES‐7 | Intended Uses of This EIR | We recommend that CAL FIRE personnel and other potential project proponents be provided adequate training and support to be able to take full advantage of the benefits of programmatic CEQA clearance and see the desired outcomes on the ground. In particular, more explicit guidance about the steps in determining consistency, substantiating findings, incorporating standard project requirements and applying mitigation measures is needed, particularly in relation to additional permits and approvals outside of CEQA.  |

###### Response A25-13

The commenter’s recommendation to provide training related to implementation of the CalVTP is noted. This recommendation will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding implementation of the CalVTP. It would be at the discretion of an agency, including CAL FIRE, to hire staff to provide training for implementation of later treatment projects and the responsibility of the agency to request or secure funding for increasing staff resources if the agency determined that the training was needed. The Board and CAL FIRE will provide training related to CalVTP implementation, including how to complete a PSA and how to provide information to CAL FIRE on proposed, approved and completed projects as required by SPR AD-7, as soon as possible after certification of the PEIR. This training will be available to project proponents, regulatory agencies, and other interested parties. The Board will contact those on the PEIR mailing list via email and post information online when the training is available.

###### Comment A25-14

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | It would be beneficial to have some representative/typical implementation flowcharts describing how a project would navigate through the regulatory approvals, including seasonal or critical path steps and deliverables that require input from outside experts to establish guidance for potential project proponents about whether to attempt use of this PEIR or pursue separate CEQA compliance. This information would likely be beneficial to CAL FIRE personnel as well as outside project proponents. |

###### Response A25-14

Refer to Master Response 4 for additional information on the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment project.

###### Comment A25-15

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1‐16, 1‐17, 1‐18 | Responsible agencies and project proponents | The County of Sonoma and numerous potential project proponents engaged in these types of projects in our region are not included in your existing list. Despite the disclaimer that the list is representative and not inclusive, we suggest that it is not feasible to appropriately note all the potential local project proponents throughout the State of California. We recommend the bulleted list be replaced with a more complete description of the categories suggested in the preceding paragraphs rather than name any specific entities. |

###### Response A25-15

As discussed in Section 1.5.2, “Responsible and Trustee Agencies,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, other types of agencies that own or manage lands within the SRA that could act as responsible agencies (project proponents) under the CalVTP include state agencies, cities, counties, water and irrigation districts, conservation districts, park and open space districts, conservation agencies, community service districts, utility districts, flood control districts, water agencies, transportation authorities, cemetery districts, and airport districts.

###### Comment A25-16

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2‐25 | Prescribed Herbivory, CRM | The Certified Rangeland Manager (CRM) license issued by the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection should also be considered a qualified person when preparing projects utilizing prescribed herbivory as a treatment activity.  |

###### Response A25-16

As discussed under “Prescribed Herbivory” in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, consulting with a CRM is advised when prescribed grazing is being considered as a treatment.

###### Comment A25-17

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2‐46, SPR‐HYD‐5 | Herbicide use, local ordinances | The County of Sonoma prohibits the use of non‐organic herbicides on public lands. Herbicide application restrictions should be limited to applicable local ordinances and the recommendations of the PCA. Herbicide use should have increased buffers around riparian areas, listed species habitat, and vernal pools. Herbicides should be excluded from the WLPZ and EEZ/ELZ buffers.  |

###### Response A25-17

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding coordination with agencies that share jurisdiction for proposed later vegetation treatment projects. Refer to Master Response 9 regarding herbicide use and sensitive biological resources. Per the requirements of SPR BIO-4, treatments in riparian habitats will be designed to retain or improve habitat functions, and herbicides would be applied by hand in riparian habitats and only during low-flow periods or when seasonal streams are dry.

###### Comment A25-18

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 3.6‐120 | Large Wood Recruitment | While SPR BIO‐4: Design Treatment to Avoid Loss or Degradation of Riparian Habitat Function includes requirements to maintain at least 75 percent of the overstory and 50 percent of the understory when implementing projects in riparian areas, no specific requirements are included to ensure adequate recruitment of large woody material to streams in support of geomorphic functions, hydraulic diversity, and aquatic habitat value. Please consider modified language such as the following: “Unless there is an verified ecological or infrastructural reason to do otherwise, trees will be felled into adjacent streams or waterbodies to accelerate wood recruitment and enhance fish habitat as approved and recommended by regulatory agencies (e.g., Accelerated Wood Recruitment and Timber Operations: Process Guidance from the California Timber Harvest Review Team Agencies and National Marine Fisheries Service). Otherwise, removed trees will be felled away from adjacent streams or waterbodies and piled outside of the riparian vegetation zone.” |

###### Response A25-18

The fourth bullet under SPR BIO-4 in Section 2.7.5, “Biological Resources Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR currently states that removed trees will be felled away from adjacent streams or water bodies and piled outside of the riparian vegetation zone unless there is an ecological reason to do otherwise that is approved by applicable regulatory agencies, such as adding large woody material to a stream to enhance fish habitat (e.g., see *Accelerated Wood Recruitment and Timber Operations: Process Guidance from the California Timber Harvest Review Team Agencies and National Marine Fisheries Service* [Wood for Salmon Working Group 2018]). This portion of SPR BIO-4 addresses felling logs into adjacent streams if it would enhance fish habitat. No revisions to the PEIR are warranted.

###### Comment A25-19

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PD‐3, 2‐18 to 2‐21 | Pile Burning  | Pile burning is characterized as a type of prescribed burning (see table 2‐3) but is not addressed in the Description of Treatment Activity (pages 2‐19 to 2‐21). Pile burning is often used as method of disposal of vegetation generated as a result of mechanical treatments which are addressed as separate activity (see page 2‐23). As a result, it is ambiguous how to fill out the project checklist (question 8, page PD‐3). We assume that a project that involves mechanical treatment and pile burning would report acreage of mechanical treatment where fuel was removed and report acreage of pile burning as the footprint of the pile. Please clarify. Another alternative would be to address pile burning as a method of disposal of material generated by mechanical treatment like lop and scatter or chipping. |

###### Response A25-19

As described in Table 2-3, “Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, pile burning is listed as a method of application under prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, and manual treatments. An example provided in Section 2.5.2, “Description of Treatment Activities,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR states that treatment activities would typically be implemented in combination. For example, a prescribed burn of 260 acres would require up to 2.5 miles of fuel break, which can result in as many as 11 of the 260 acres being cleared by heavy equipment for use as control lines. If pile burning occurs within the footprint of a mechanical or manual treatment, only the total acreage of the mechanical or manual treatment would be included in the PSA.

###### Comment A25-20

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2‐25 | SPR GEO‐4 | Erosion control treatments are not necessarily beneficial, and can be detrimental in situations where they are not required. Could some exemption be incorporated for projects occurring on low slopes and/or soil types where there is low or negligible erosion hazard?  |

###### Response A25-20

SPR GEO-3 requires soil to be stabilized after mechanical treatments, prescribed herbivory, and some prescribed burn treatments only if the area could result in substantial sediment discharge. Less mulch is required if the soil erosion hazard is lower. This approach addresses erosion control in areas with a lower erosion hazard.

Letter A26  **Los Angeles Department of Water and Power**

Brian Gonzalez, Environmental Planning and Assessment

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A26-1

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (Draft PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP).

Based on our preliminary review of the Draft PEIR, we have determined that the CalVTP may impact LADWP facilities/interests and respectfully submit the following comments below for consideration:

1. Board of Forestry and Fire Protection referenced herein shall pertain to its employees, agents, consultants, contractors, officers, patrons, or invitees of Board of Forestry and Fire Protection; or any other Board of Forestry and Fire Protection affiliated entities.

2. Board of Forestry and Fire Protection shall acknowledge that the LADWP is an integral component of the transmission line system which provides electric power to the City of Los Angeles and other local communities. Their use is under the jurisdiction of the Federal North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC). Safety and protection of critical facilities are primary factors used to evaluate secondary land use proposals. The rights of way serve as platforms for access, construction, maintenance, facility expansion, and emergency operations. Therefore, the proposed use may from time to time be subject to temporary disruption caused by such operations.

3. The following locations will potentially be impacted by the California Vegetation Treatment Program:

* Mojave Desert Ecological Section
* Mono Ecological Section
* Sierra Nevada Ecological Section
* Southeast Great Basin Ecological Section
* Southern California Coast Ecological Section
* Southern California Mountain and Valley Ecological Section

4. Prescribed burning will not be allowed on the Transmission Line Right of Ways (TLRW) as no fires and burning of materials are allowed on LADWP’s TLRW. The burning of materials on the TLRWs may lead to power outages in the transmission system and impact the system reliability of the transmission grid.

5. Mechanical Treatment, Manual Treatment, and Prescribed Herbivory must be reviewed and approved by the LADWP Right-of-Way Engineering Group before being implemented on LADWP’s TLRW.

6. Herbicides within LADWP’s TLRW will require LADWP’s Environmental Group’s review & approval.

7. This reply shall in no way be construed as an approval of any project.

LADWP’s formal response letter that includes the comments above will be sent via US Mail.

###### Response A26-1

Refer to responses to comments A16-1 through A16-7 that address the comments that were provided with LADWP’s formal response letter, which are consistent with the items summarized in this comment.

Letter A27 **University of California, Berkeley**

Sally McGarrahan, Associate Vice Chancellor – Facilities

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A27-1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP). The University of California, Berkeley (UCB), manages close to 45,000 acres of wildlands within reserves and research field stations in more than ten counties throughout the state that may be located within the State Responsibility Area (SRA). Additionally, UCB manages approximately 800 acres of steep and rugged land in an area known as the Hill Campus within the wildland-urban interface (WUI) located mostly within the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

The CalVTP PEIR identifies the treatable landscape of tl1e SRA where vegetation conditions are suitable for treatment as approximately 20.3 million acres. The CalVTP PEIR targets treatment of 250,000 acres annually of non-federal land to reduce wildfire risk and establish more natural fire regimes.

UCB supports CAL FIRE’s understanding that the effectiveness of reducing the harmful effects of wildfire state wide will take a concerted effort by numerous public agencies and private landowners. This is demonstrated by CAL FIRE making available a variety of grant programs providing funding sources to specifically fund vegetation management to increase the acres of vegetation treated by other public agencies. Last year, UCB was awarded $3.6 million through CAL FIRE’s California Climate Investments Forest Health Grant Program to advance fire prevention in the Hill Campus.

UCB supports the goals of the CalVTP PEIR and the project objectives to reduce wildfire risks and avoid or diminish the harmful effects of wildfire on the people, property and natural resources in the State of California. Many of the UCB reserves and research field stations have planned projects that have similar aims; these projects are already part of the local CAL FIRE Unit Plans. UCB appreciates the extensive interagency coordination in preparation of the CalVTP PEIR and the project’s programmatic design that allows various public agencies, including the University of California, with land ownership and/or management responsibilities in the treatable landscape, to implement vegetation treatments consistent with the CalVTP, using the PEIR for CEQA compliance. The CalVTP PEIR will facilitate implementation of wildfire hazard reduction projects on many of the UCB properties that will promote both life safety and ecosystem health.

Though the CalVTP focuses on vegetation treatment activities within the SRA, the PEIR also identifies areas suitable for fuel breaks within the WUI that extend into the LRA. The CalVTP PEIR covers fuel break construction activities within the LRA on UCB’s Hill Campus. UCB strongly supports inclusion of limited treatment activities within the CalVTP PEIR because this CEQA streamlining could facilitate the pace and scale of UCB in implementing projects to reduce wildfire risk and diminish or avoid the harmful effects of wildfire.

###### Response A27-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

Letter A28 **California Department of Parks and Recreation**

Jay Chamberlin, Chief, Natural Resources Division

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A28-1

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). As a potential responsible agency for the CalVTP, as defined by Public Resources Code (PRC) 21069, DPR has a long history of cooperatively working with Cal Fire under the current Vegetation Management Program and looks forward to continued collaboration.

DPR submitted comments on the NOP for the CalVTP on March 11, 2019. We appreciate you addressing our comments in the preparation of the CalVTP PEIR. These comments closely track the comments submitted in our previous letter.

DPR's mission, in part, is to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. DPR manages roughly 300,000 acres of forest land across its forested park units. A well-crafted VTP will provide a valuable tool to manage these lands. In the context of our responsibility as stewards of these resources, we offer the following comments on this PEIR.

DPR supports the intent of the VTP to provide a framework and program for vegetation treatments that seek to return the landscape to conditions that more closely replicate native habitats, allowing the re-establishment of natural fire processes and attendant ecosystem benefits. Implementation of the ecological restoration treatment type aligns well with DPR goals and current practices for forest management on DPR managed lands.

###### Response A28-1

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A28-2

While prescribed fire and forest restoration treatments, including fuel reduction, that can lead to re-establishing natural fire, are closely aligned with DPR practices and goals, other mechanisms in the VTP are less applicable to State Park lands. For example, in general DPR's management goals and internal policies discourage the construction and maintenance of firebreaks, fuel breaks, and other fuel modification zones on park lands except under specific circumstances. While we understand fuel breaks are used as a treatment option, projects that propose fuel breaks on or adjacent to DPR land need to be closely scoped and coordinated with DPR staff to minimize disturbance and damage to park resources. Shaded fuel breaks provide a better option whenever strategically important to wildfire containment and installed/maintained in a manner that protects sensitive species and visual esthetics, and minimizes erosion and accidental introductions of exotic flora.

The PEIR describes mitigation and avoidance measures to address sensitive and listed plants and wildlife, as well as water quality, soil erosion, sedimentation, and recreation. For implementing such measures – or any treatment on DPR lands – it will always be critical to coordinate with DPR staff during project scoping to minimize impacts to park uses and resources.

###### Response A28-2

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations.

###### Comment A28-3

SPR BIO-9 describes actions that will be taken to prevent the spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds. In addition to these actions, the PEIR should include actions that address follow-up treatment, if invasive plants colonize a newly treated area.

###### Response A28-3

Refer to Master Response 8 regarding follow-up monitoring and adaptive management.

###### Comment A28-4

CEQA Compliance

PR is responsible for CEQA compliance for projects on DPR land. DPR expects that the level of analysis is sufficiently robust to support preparation of a project-level compliance through a notice of exemption (NOE) if no other project impacts are identified.

###### Response A28-4

Refer to Master Response 4 for additional information on the process for developing, reviewing, and approving proposed vegetation treatment project. This Final PEIR does not preclude the use of exemptions, as appropriate, for vegetation treatment projects.

###### Comment A28-5

Specific to cultural resources, state-managed historic resources must be in compliance with PRC 5024 and 5024.5 if they may be impacted by this VTP. Compliance consists of identifying cultural resources, evaluating, and recommending historical significance. For any potential impacts identified, necessary avoidance, mitigation or treatment will be undertaken in consultation with the SHPO.

###### Response A28-5

As discussed under SPR CUL-7 in Section 2.7, “Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resource Standard Project Requirements,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, if the records search conducted for a later vegetation treatment project identifies built historical resources, as defined in Section 15064.5 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the project proponent will avoid these resources.

###### Comment A28-6

DPR notes that CEQA checklist for Cultural Resources provided on page 4-299 is outdated. The new CEQA checklist (2016) moved the analyses of paleontological features to the Geology and Soils section of the EIR. A new checklist question provided by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research asks for inclusion in the Cultural Resources section of an EIR asks to identify Tribal Cultural Resources, which can only be completed in consultation with California Native American Tribal entities.

###### Response A28-6

The 2019 State CEQA Guidelines were used in preparation of the PEIR. As stated in Section 3.7, “Geology, Soils, Paleontology, and Mineral Resources,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, this section evaluates the potential for implementation of the proposed CalVTP to affect geology, soils, paleontology, and mineral resources. Paleontological resources are not addressed in Section 3.5, “Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resources.” This is consistent with the current version of the State CEQA Guidelines.

###### Comment A28-7

DPR is responsible for managing significant acreage in the area defined as "treatable landscape" as defined in the PEIR and has a long history of conducting prescribed fires for land management. With proposed landscape scale projects that include DPR lands, DPR requests to be included in scoping of these larger projects that include DPR lands, and expects to continue to maintain control over activities on its lands even in the rare instance that project level reviews are initiated by a non-DPR entity. For landscape level fuel breaks that include, or are adjacent to DPR lands, the entity responsible for long-term maintenance, and associated funding, should be identified prior to approval.

DPR has a cadre of trained and knowledgeable staff who currently carry out fuel reduction treatment on DPR lands. Given this fact, DPR requests to be included in discussions, decision making, and oversight on treatment standards/specifications and treatment, including prescribed fire, relating to CalVTP projects on DPR land or part of a larger multi-ownership landscape level project.

DPR looks forward to continued and increased collaboration in the treatment of DPR lands and appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on this CalVTP PEIR. We look forward to working with you as you complete this process. If you have any questions or additional clarification on these comments, please contact Terri Gaines at terri.gaines@parks.ca. gov.

###### Response A28-7

Refer to Master Response 7 regarding agency coordination and compliance with regulations. The commenter may act as a project proponent using the CalVTP PEIR for CEQA coverage and would design and implement any treatment project on its land according to its regulations and location-specific needs, selecting among the treatment types and activities identified in the CalVTP.

Letter A29 **Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District**

Coty Sifuentes‐Winter, Senior Resource Management Specialist

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A29-1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the California Vegetation Treatment Program Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) (State Clearinghouse number 2019012052).

Created in 1972, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) (www.openspace.org) is an independent special district that has preserved over 63,000 acres of public land and manages 26 open space preserves. The District’s boundary extends from San Carlos to Los Gatos and to the Pacific Ocean from south of Pacifica to the Santa Cruz County line. The District’s purpose is to create a regional greenbelt of unspoiled public open space lands in order to permanently protect the area’s natural resources and to provide for public use and enjoyment.

Preserves include redwood, oak, and fir forests, chaparral-covered hillsides, riparian corridors, grasslands, and wetlands along the San Francisco Bay. Ranging from 55 to over 18,000 acres, 24 preserves are open to the public free of charge, 365 days a year. Visitors will find over 225 miles of trails, ranging from easy to challenging terrain.

###### Response A29-1

The summary of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A29-2

**Upon the review of the document, the District wishes to make the following comments:**

The District lies completely within the USFS Ecological Section 261A (Central California Coast). The District’s three-part Mission Statement includes our directive to “protect and restore the natural environment.” The reintroduction of the ecological process of fire into fire-adapted or fire-obligated ecological communities would assist the District to meet this community-supported objective.

###### Response A29-2

The commenter’s expression of support for reintroducing fire into fire-adapted communities will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.

###### Comment A29-3

As a best management practice, the District encourages the use of Botanists and/or Invasive Species Biologists during the planning stages of any vegetation management project. The use of certain methods, such as using any tool that cuts plants off at the ground level, can greatly increase fuel load when certain plants respond to being cut. Many of these species are also considered a fire hazard in and of themselves (i.e. French broom, cotoneaster, blue gum eucalyptus). The use of more permanent treatment methods using an Integrated Pest Management approach, including mandatory follow-up treatments, should be employed. Although more permanent methods may increase the upfront costs of the project, the reduction in maintenance to the area would benefit the long-term budget of the project as well as reducing human residence time in wildland areas and thus impacts to wildlife. The District encourages language that calls out the use of a Botanist or Invasive Species Biologist within the Project-Specific Analysis (Appendix PD-3) under the Environmental Checklist #6: Description of the Project.

###### Response A29-3

As discussed in Section 3.6.3, “Analysis Methodology,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, biological resource SPRs and mitigation measures require that qualified individuals implement components of the measures. The individuals must meet the requirements listed in this section to be considered qualified, and they may have various titles (including biologist, botanist, invasive species biologist, ecologist, RPF, biological technician, or supervised designees working at the direction of a qualified professional), as long as they are qualified for the task at hand.

###### Comment A29-4

In reviewing the CalVTP Treatable Area, certain lands owned and managed by the District are excluded from the “Treatable Area” in which the safe use of Prescribed Fire would be beneficial both in terms of reducing fuel loads that may contribute to a higher risk of catastrophic fire to neighboring communities, as well as providing numerous ecological benefits. The CEQA analysis in the DEIR already includes all relevant environmental factors potentially affected (i.e. threatened and endangered species) for the excluded areas described below (see attached map of the areas described). The District believes that the described mitigation measure outlined in the DEIR are sufficient and the inclusion of the excluded areas described below would not change the findings of the DEIR.

Fremont Older Open Space Preserve (1)
Approximately 520 acres on the eastern side of this preserve has been excluded. Reintroduction of fire to the vast grasslands here would greatly increase the biodiversity.

La Honda Open Space Preserve (2)
Approximately 300 acres in the Northwest section of the preserve has been excluded. This area is a special management zone (Conservation Management Unit) that has been established in highly-sensitive areas to protect and enhance biotic resources, including native wildlife, and aquatic, riparian, grassland, and forest habitats. The exclusion of fire in this area has greatly increased the grass thatch layer which is starting to exclude native forbs. The reintroduction of fire in this area would greatly enhance the habitat for Federally-List species, such as the California red-legged frog.

Los Trancos Open Space Preserve (3)
Approximately 160 acres in the Northern section of the preserve has been excluded. Half of this area contains a high-biodiverse oak woodland. Per the University of California Oak Woodland Management webpage ([https://ucanr.edu/sites/oak\_range/Oak\_Articles\_On\_Line/Oaks\_and\_Fire/The\_Role\_of\_ Fire\_in\_Californias\_Oak\_Woodlands/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/oak_range/Oak_Articles_On_Line/Oaks_and_Fire/The_Role_of_%20Fire_in_Californias_Oak_Woodlands/)):

Fire is a natural part of California’s oak woodland ecosystem. It has also served as an important management tool since Native Americans first inhabited these areas. Fire plays a role in the development of oak woodland stand structure, oak regeneration processes, the development of habitat for wildlife, nutrient cycling.

Outside of the oak woodlands, the District has been managing high-biodiverse grasslands, and the exclusion of fire in this area has greatly increased the grass thatch layer, which is starting to exclude native forbs.

###### Response A29-4

As described in Chapter 1, “Introduction,” in Volume II of this Final PEIR, CAL FIRE has the primary responsibility for preventing and suppressing fires within the SRA (PRC Sections 4113 and 4125). The treatable landscape, which is the portion of the SRA where vegetation conditions are suitable for treatment, consists of approximately 20.3 million acres. The CalVTP does not preclude treatments by other agencies outside of the treatable landscape; however, CAL FIRE’s jurisdiction is limited to lands within the SRA. Refer to response to comment A21-1 regarding the factors that could be considered by the project proponent in using the PEIR for treatment areas outside of the treatable landscape.

###### Comment A29-5

Monte Bello Open Space Preserve (4)
The entirety of 3,436 acre preserve has been excluded from “Treatable Area.” Vast areas of this preserve have yellow-star thistle infestations which the District wished to use phenology-timed Prescribed Fire to treat; peer-review research has shown this method to reduce the yellow star thistle infestations. Prescribed Fire within Sugarloaf Ridge State Park demonstrated a marked reduction in the occupation of yellow star thistle while nearly doubling the cover of other forbs, and native species. (see Use of Fire for Yellow Star Thistle). In addition, the District has identified an area within the preserve to perform fire suppression training (i.e. suppression actives, Unified Command) during a prescribed fire event.

Sincerely,

Coty Sifuentes-Winter, Supervisory Vegetation Ecologist
Project Manager for the development of the District’s Wildland Fire Resiliency Program

###### Response A29-5

The use of prescribed burning to control invasive yellow star thistle is noted. The attachments provided by the commenter and referenced in this comment were reviewed by the PEIR preparers. Refer to response to comment A21-1 regarding the factors that could be considered by the project proponent in using the PEIR for treatment areas outside of the treatable landscape.

Letter A30 **University of California, Merced**

Phillip Woods, Director of Physical and Environmental Planning

August 9, 2019

###### Comment A30-1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP). The University of California, Merced (UC Merced), manages several properties that includes the UC Merced campus consisting of 1,026 acres and the adjoining Merced Vernal Pools and Grassland Natural Reserve consisting of 6,460-acres that are both located in Merced County, and the Buckhorn Flat Ranch consisting of 503 acres that is located in Mariposa County. It is our understanding that these properties are located within the State Responsibility Area (SRA).

###### Response A30-1

The description of the jurisdiction of the commenting agency is noted. No further response is warranted.

###### Comment A30-2

The CalVTP PEIR will facilitate implementation of wildfire hazard reduction projects in the State of California that will promote both life safety and ecosystem health. UC Merced's management of the properties mentioned above have similar goals that are already part of the local CAL FIRE Unit Plans. The University supports the goals of the CalVTP PEIR including the project objectives to reduce wildfire risks and avoid or diminish the harmful effects of wildfire on the people, property and natural resources. In addition, UC Merced supports the inclusion of limited treatment activities within the CalVTP PEIR because this CEQA streamlining could facilitate the implementation of projects that would reduce wildfire risk and diminish or avoid the harmful effects of wildfire.

UC Merced appreciates the extensive interagency coordination in preparation of the CalVTP PEIR and the project's programmatic design that allows various public agencies, including the University of California, with land ownership and/or management responsibilities in the treatable landscape, to implement vegetation treatments consistent with the CalVTP, using the PEIR for CEQA compliance.

###### Response A30-2

The commenter’s expression of support for the proposed CalVTP will be provided to the Board for consideration in its decision-making process regarding the CalVTP.