

Toward an East Bay Wildfire Prevention Vegetation Management Agency

It is time for a new, more effective, regional approach if the East Bay Hills are to be safe from future wildfires. This is in support of using the Joint Powers Authority process to address the wildfire threat posed by inadequate vegetation management in the hills of Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

Today, local government agencies are responsible for preventing and fighting wildfires in urbanized areas and counties are responsible for unincorporated areas. But wildfires cross jurisdictional boundaries involving multiple cities and counties.

Wildfires move at hurricane speeds and force, with winds from 60 to 100 mph, fast enough to jump huge freeways. It took only one hour for the Berkeley Oakland Tunnel Fire to move from the Berkeley Hills across the Highway 24 freeway to destroy homes in the Upper Rockridge area of Oakland. To the north, it took only four hours for the Tubbs Fire to move from the Napa Valley to Santa Rosa. To the south, the Thomas Fire moved from Ventura to Santa Barbara, jumping a 15-lane freeway. Once started, extinguishing wildfires often is no longer possible, leaving evacuation as the only answer. Evacuation times are often measured in minutes, or less.

Since they are impossible to stop once they get going, preventing wildfires becomes our only choice. In Alameda County alone, there are 14 separate cities. If vegetation in our area is to be well managed to reduce the threat of wildfire, the necessary expertise, workforce and financial resources must be assembled over a broad enough area to be effective. Local agencies with all their present responsibilities unfortunately lack sufficient breadth and resources to adequately address the problem. Coordinating vegetation management among all the East Bay local public agencies is an impossible challenge without a mechanism to lead that effort.

Just as we have special districts in the Bay Area to manage air quality, water quality, and regional planning and transportation, it is time to create a wildfire prevention district to manage vegetation and dramatically reduce the fuel that causes the spread of wildfires in our wildland urban interface. Local government agencies in Alameda and Contra Costa counties can create a joint powers authority to accomplish this.

An East Bay Wildfire Prevention and Vegetation Management Agency would

- (1) Develop a plan to reduce the most flammable wildlands vegetation in the East Bay Hills to the maximum extent feasible and to replace it with wildfire resistant vegetation where appropriate.
- (2) The plan would protect sensitive wildlife habitats and native plant landscapes.

- (3) The plan would include a “Defensible Space” program to aid owners of private property with information resources to manage vegetation on their properties.
- (4) The plan would include a "Home Hardening" program to advise homeowners, schools and commercial property owners on how their structures can be protected from wildfires.
- 5) Raise funds by applying for state and federal grants, preparing tax measures for voter approval and other means permitted by law.
- 6) Implement the plan by retaining sufficient staff and equipment and/or by contracting with others to remove the most flammable vegetation in wildland areas and to implement the public information programs for defensible space and home hardening.

An added benefit of a district that addresses this problem may be that the current difficulties many property owners are facing with either cancellation of their homeowner insurance policies or huge rate increases due to increased fire risks would be lessened.

**East Bay Wildfire Prevention and Vegetation Management Joint Protection Agency
Endorsements as of June 1, 2021**

Elected Officials

<i>Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Agency/Municipality</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Role</i>
<i>California</i>	State Senate	Nancy Skinner	Senator, District 9
<i>California</i>	State Assembly	Buffy Wicks	Assemblymember, District 15
<i>California</i>	State Assembly	Mia Bonta	Candidate, District 18
<i>California</i>	State Assembly	Janani Ramachandran	Candidate, District 18
<i>Alameda</i>	Board of Supervisors	Keith Carson	Supervisor, District 5
<i>Alameda</i>	Albany	Rochelle Nason	City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Berkeley	Jesse Arreguin	Mayor
<i>Alameda</i>	Berkeley	Lori Droste	Vice Mayor, City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Berkeley	Susan Wengraf	City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Dublin	Shawn Kumagai	City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Fremont	Vinnie Bacon	Former City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Hayward	Aisha Wahab	City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Libby Schaaf	Mayor
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Sheng Thao	Mayor Pro Tem, City Councilmember
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Dan Kalb	City Councilmember
<i>Contra Costa</i>	Board of Supervisors	John Gioia	Supervisor, District 1
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Paul Fadelli	Mayor

<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Gabriel Quinto	Mayor Pro Tem, City Councilmember
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Janet Abelson	City Councilmember
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Tessa Rudnick	City Councilmember
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Greg Lyman	Former Mayor
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Rochelle Pardue-Okimoto	Former City Councilmember
<i>Contra Costa</i>	Hercules	Tiffany Grimsley	City Councilmember
<i>Contra Costa</i>	San Pablo	Rita Xavier	Vice Mayor, City Councilmember
<i>Regional</i>	East Bay Regional Park District	Dee Rosario	Board Member
<i>Regional</i>	East Bay Regional Park District	Dennis Waespi	Board Member

Community Organizations

<i>Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Agency/Municipality</i>	<i>Organization</i>
<i>Alameda</i>	Berkeley & Oakland	Claremont Canyon Conservancy
<i>Alameda</i>	Berkeley & Oakland	Claremont Elmwood Neighborhood Association
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Friends of the Montclair RR Trail
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Garber Park Stewards
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Montclair Neighborhood Council
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	North Hills Community Association
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Oakland Firefighters IAFF Local 55
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Oakland Firesafe Council
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Oakland Landscape Committee
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	Piedmont Pines Neighborhood Assn.
<i>Alameda</i>	Oakland	South Hills Beat 35Y
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	El Cerrito Trail Trekkers
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Cerrito	Make El Cerrito Fire Safe
<i>Contra Costa</i>	El Sobrante	94803 Emergency Preparedness Alliance
<i>Contra Costa</i>	Kensington	Kensington Neighbors for Wildfire Safety
<i>Contra Costa</i>	Kensington	Kensington Public Safety Council
<i>Contra Costa</i>	Regional	Phreed (Pinole, Hercules, Rodeo, El Sobrante for Equity & Diversity)
<i>Contra Costa</i>	Richmond	Richmond Firefighters Local 188
<i>Regional</i>	East Bay Regional Park District	Regional Parks Association
<i>Regional</i>	Regional	The Sierra Club