

Marin County Forest Health and Fire Resilience Public Works Plan (PWP)

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is a Public Works Plan (PWP)?

PWPs describe a framework for planning, reviewing, and permitting future activities (such as shaded fuel breaks) that would otherwise trigger individual permits under the California Coastal Act. This PWP does not identify or approve specific projects. Rather than pursuing a separate Coastal Development Permit (CDP) for each future project proposed, projects may instead be analyzed under the PWP framework, once completed and authorized, as part of an integrated and coordinated program that includes objectives identified by California Coastal Commission (CCC) staff, Tribal participants, and lead agencies. This ensures that each future project is consistent with the overall vision of the PWP and priorities identified by participants. This, in turn, creates a faster and more efficient process to approve wildfire risk reduction activities that protect and even enhance sensitive resources.

Why is vegetation management needed in Coastal Marin?

Much of Coastal Marin has a long history of frequent low intensity fire, both cultural burning and wildfire, that provided ecological benefits and reduced the buildup of vegetation on the landscape. In fact, coastal grasslands likely burned every 1-3 years and coastal redwoods likely burned every 10-30 years according to the [Point Reyes National Seashore](#). These low intensity frequent fires have been largely eradicated through the outlawing of cultural burning and efficacy of modern fire suppression efforts. Additionally, with European settlement, highly flammable non-native invasive plants have become prevalent on the landscape, often crowding out native species. Without frequent low intensity fire, vegetation builds up on the landscape making fires more intense and more dangerous to people and ecosystems.

This buildup of vegetation on the landscape, coupled with a changing climate, contributes to wildfire risk in Coastal Marin. In fact, [CAL FIRE's recent update to hazard maps](#) for the State Responsibility Areas shows a marked increase in High (orange) and Very High (red) Fire Hazard Severity Zone Areas in Coastal Marin over previous hazard maps. Coastal Marin has a history of wildfire, including the [1995 Vision Fire](#), during which 44 homes were lost, serving as an example of the vulnerability of coastal Marin communities.

Working with experts to both reduce unnatural fuel buildup and restore native plant communities can reduce the intensity and severity of future wildfires and reduce the likelihood that they could destroy forests, burn down homes, and risk the lives of residents. Only a combination of strategic vegetation management, home hardening, defensible space, and public education can make our communities and landscapes wildfire resilient.

What Types of Vegetation Treatments May Occur in Coastal Marin?

Vegetation management projects for wildfire resilience typically target understory vegetation and not live, healthy, mature, non-hazardous trees. This includes dead and down woody debris, non-native invasive shrubs and trees (such as French broom, gorse, acacia, echium, etc.), which out compete native understory plants and act as ladder fuels. These understory plants compete for water and nutrients. Diseased and otherwise hazardous trees, such as dead trees if they pose a hazard to nearby homes or roadways, may also be removed. Without invasive plant competition, mature native trees thrive, sequester more carbon, and are more resilient to future droughts and fires. Removing excess understory plants acts as a surrogate for fire that would otherwise occur naturally and burn this vegetation. These activities have ecological benefits as well as wildfire resilience benefits and help create landscape conditions that more closely resemble those before widespread fire suppression and invasion of non-native species.

Does this PWP identify specific projects?

No, this PWP only outlines requirements for future project permits and describes the kinds of activities that could be done in the future. It is not a permit nor a project because it does not propose or allow specific projects in Coastal Marin. Those will be proposed in the future with opportunities for more public comment.

Why does the PWP Program Area map show such a big area?

The PWP Program Area includes the portion of the Marin County Coastal Zone where the PWP coastal permitting process could be applied for future wildfire risk reduction and forest health activities. Only a fraction of the PWP Program Area would ever be prioritized for treatment (generally in very targeted locations around communities and evacuation routes). No specific projects have been identified within the PWP at this time.

Why does the PWP only discuss vegetation? Why not home hardening and defensible space?

A PWP is not a comprehensive wildfire strategy document. It is limited to describing activities that the Coastal Commission would permit, such as shaded fuel breaks. The document only addresses Coastal Commission regulatory requirements.

Marin Wildfire's strategy for Coastal Marin and throughout its jurisdiction includes public education, home hardening and defensible space inspections, grants to residents, free chipping for residents doing their defensible space work, evacuation and alert planning, and many other projects and programs in addition to vegetation management in very specific locations, such as next to neighborhoods and along evacuation routes. Future project activities conducted under the PWP will integrate with these other Marin Wildfire efforts to increase fire resiliency in Coastal Marin.

Does this open the door to logging along the coast?

No. Tree removal is not the target of these projects. No logging would take place as part of Marin Wildfire-funded or led work. Logging focuses on removing large economically valuable trees. In contrast, our work keeps mature native trees on the landscape and, instead, removes dead and down woody debris, non-native invasive shrubs and trees, lower branches of trees, and some very targeted overcrowded, diseased, or otherwise particularly hazardous vegetation.

Could future projects under the PWP use herbicides?

Non-native, invasive plants are common throughout Marin County. These species reduce biodiversity, crowd out native plant species, and increase wildfire risk. Marin Wildfire and its Member Agencies use manual or mechanical methods to remove non-native, invasive shrubs (such as French broom and gorse) or trees (such as eucalyptus or acacia) first. While most vegetation management activities do not include the use of herbicides, it can be a useful tool where other methods to control non-native, invasive species are not feasible or effective. Species like French broom or eucalyptus are known for aggressive growth and can regrow quickly if only treated manually or mechanically, reducing the longevity and effectiveness of fuel treatments. Typically, treatment includes dabbing triclopyr (Garlon 4 Ultra) with a sponge-like applicator onto freshly cut eucalyptus, black acacia, or other stumps to reduce regrowth for very aggressive, non-native, invasive species. The use of herbicide at a small scale in a targeted manner is consistent with the practices of many land management agencies and conservation/restoration organizations in Marin and the region beyond (see more information below). All herbicide is applied by a qualified professional consistent with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles. Marin Wildfire consistently reviews scientific literature to ensure herbicides are used in a manner that most effectively addresses flammable invasive vegetation while preventing vegetation, soil, and water exposure. Under the PWP, any future project that includes herbicide application would conduct the treatment in a targeted manner only if such treatment activities are the least environmentally damaging feasible alternative to achieve project objectives.

Many conservation organizations recognize the need for limited herbicide use according to IPM principles when

managing non-native, invasive species such as eucalyptus. A few examples are listed below.

- Review **Marin Conservation League's** policy related to herbicide use here: [Integrated Pest Management Policy](#)
- Review the **California Native Plant Society's** management recommendations for eucalyptus and related vegetation by scrolling down to "Management Considerations" here: [Eucalyptus and associated vegetation](#)
- Review the **California Invasive Plant Council's** description of eucalyptus and how best to manage it by scrolling to the bottom of this page: [Cal-IPC Plant report on Eucalyptus globulus](#)
- Review the **Sierra Club's** acknowledgement that herbicide is a useful tool for management of eucalyptus and other non-native species here: [Vegetation Management for Fire Safety in the East Bay Hills](#)

What happens after the PWP is approved?

Following Coastal Commission approval and subsequent consideration by the Marin Wildfire Board of Directors for secondary approval with incorporation of any modifications, any proposed projects still require:

- CEQA compliance,
- Preparation of a Notice of Impending Development (NOID), and
- Coastal Commission approval.

Future projects would focus on work directly adjacent to homes and evacuation routes as well as in locations where Coastal Commission staff recommends for forest/ecosystem health purposes. It is important to note that only a very small portion of the program area would be part of any proposed future projects.