

EBRPD Tour of Richmond Wildfire Concern Areas – September 27, 2022



Report by: Soheila Bana, WCCFSC President

The tour of wildfire safety concern areas in Richmond was organized by EBRPD Assistant Fire Chief Khari Helae for Angel Montoya, Richmond Fire Chief and WCCFSC Agency Liaison, and Soheila Bana, WCCFSC President.

The original itinerary was for 3 hours to cover the following areas:

- Miller Knox Regional Shoreline (Fuels Management Program)
- Brickyard Cove (View work in progress/ Tree mortality)
- Wildcat Canyon Regional Park (Eucalyptus thinning/ Goat grazing/ Tree mortality)
- Sobrante Ridge Regional Preserve (Tree mortality)

In practice, the Brickyard Cove area was skipped due to time constraint, and the following area was added to the end of the tour per WCCFSC request.

- EBRPD's landbank area near Tri Lane (Tree mortality) - Added because of WCCFSC request

We started the tour at 1:30 pm at Miller Knox, and ended around 5 pm at San Pablo Dam Rd. Below is a summary report of the tour.



The above picture, from left to right: Captain Patrick McEntyre, Assistant Chief Khari Helae, RFD Chief/WCCFSC Agency Liaison Angel Montoya, EBRPD Fire Chief Aileen Theile, and Fuel Reduction Coordinators, Collin Gallagher and Steve Keller.

- Miller Knox Regional Shoreline (Fuels Management Program)

Chief Theile and Assistant Fire Chief provided an overview of the EBRPD fuel reduction program as well as the CEQA requirements for their FEMA grants. Then Captain Patrick McEntyre and Fuel Reduction Coordinator Collin Gallagher talked about their jobs.

EBRPD Fire Chiefs explained how they treat possible wildfire areas, and how they need to take their time because of environmental and budgetary concerns. They also answered some questions by Chief Montoya and myself; I tried to share all the questions I had received from residents.

Collin provided a detailed report of how they receive phone calls from residents about their concerns and have removed all French Broom plants from Miller Knox Regional Shoreline, removed many Eucalyptus trees, and used goats on the steep slope for weed abatement. You can see the results in the pictures below that show a very clear ground and limbed up trees.



On the side: While Patrick was speaking, we noticed a fire on the other side of the water. Initially, it was growing rapidly as we were talking, but eventually it became under control.



- Wildcat Canyon Regional Park (Eucalyptus thinning/ Goat grazing/ Tree mortality)

This was the Alvarado Staging Area at the end of Wildcat Canyon Parkway, behind Park Ave. The following picture shows an area of major concern by residents of East Richmond Heights and North Arlington. Patrick explained that they use herbicides on the stump of Eucalyptus trees but still Eucalyptus trees sprout in the area, and they hope that gradually over time they will be replaced by Bay and Oak trees. I was told that this is a very good condition

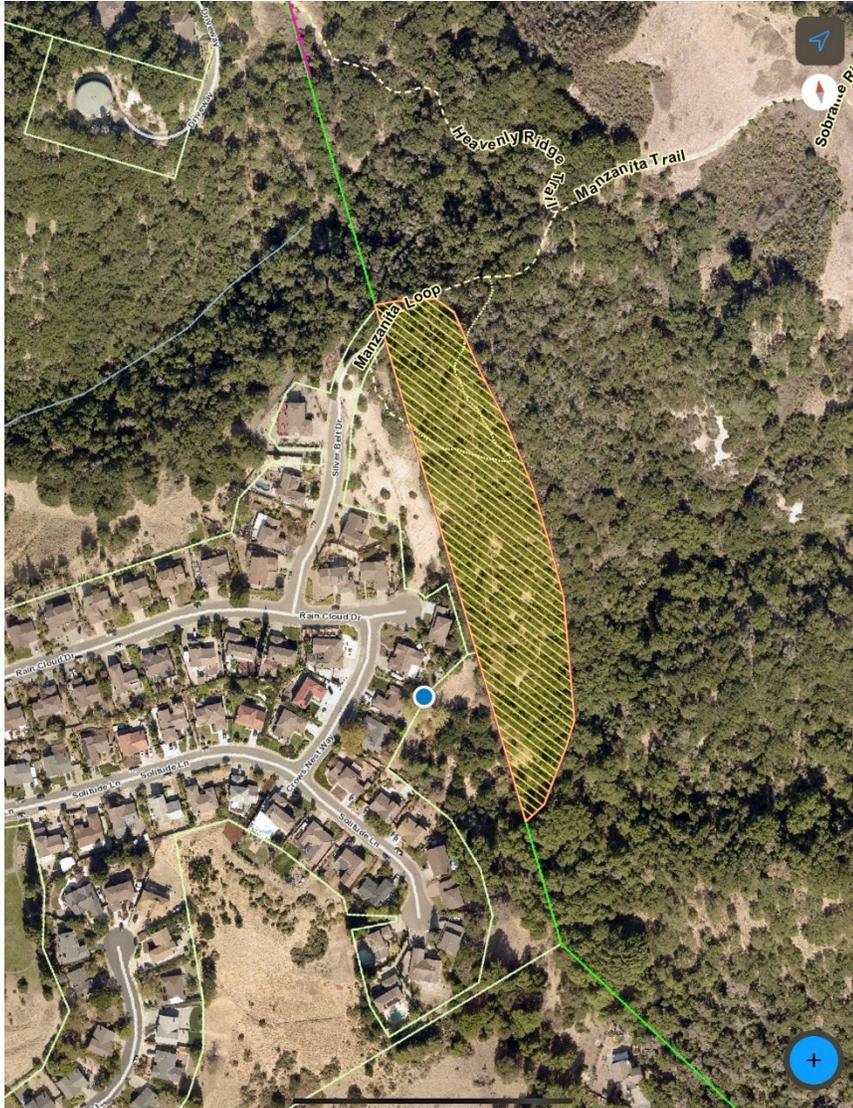


They explained that it requires special contractors with special equipment to work in areas around the Wildcat Creek to increase wildfire safety of the residents. EBRPD has spent a great deal of budget on vegetation management in this area.



- Sobrante Ridge Regional Preserve (Tree mortality)

Thanks to Melissa, a member of the WCCFSC Board who lives in the area, who opened her backyard to us and we were able to see the area closely. Chief Helae and Captain McIntyre explained that a large portion of the area was already assigned to be treated, as shown in the map below. It is to be done prior to the fire season of 2023.



Note that there are other areas near the EBRPD treatment area that belong to the City of Richmond. We asked if EBRPD could help with CEQA in such similar areas with close proximity. Chief Montoya and Chief Theille discussed the possibility of EBRPD staff providing training for Crew 12 wrt CEQA and the City Planning providing the necessary signatures.

- **EBRPD's landbank area near Tri Lane (Tree mortality)**

This area was added because an El Sobrante resident, Paula, informed us about it and since she lives nearby and happened to be there, she joined us for this portion of the tour. I learned that EBRPD had purchased this property from the Federal Reserve Bank at an auction and is keeping it for now to become a park in the future that is possibly connected by a tunnel under San Pablo Dam Rd. For now, the park seems neglected with many dead and dying trees. Chief Helae thanked us for bringing the area to their attention and said that it would be considered for treatment.



Along the way, we saw cut down vegetation left on the side of the road. I had also received the following picture from David who had complained that EBRPD staff cut down the dead trees and leave them in place. Captain McIntyre explained that leaving large logs would be ok, but leaving flammable vegetation in place is not a good practice.

It became clear that EBRPD has two separate divisions: Fuel Management, run by the Fire Chiefs, and Operation, run by other staff. Apparently, the Operation staff who are in charge of park maintenance, do not remove the cut down vegetation. We asked Assistant Chief Helae to educate Operation staff about removing cut down vegetation and remove them for fuel reduction.

At the end, I invited Chief Helae to a Zoom community gathering in a couple of months when hopefully there are some pointers to a future scheduled treatment in this area.



Along the tour, I learned that:

- EBRPD has a fire station and a helicopter, and will help RPD and Con Fire if needed. The closes station to us is located at Alvarado Park.

Additional Questions/Requests shared with EBRPD:

I requested for Fire Danger Today signs by the park entrances in our area; Fire Chief Teile said that she would look into it.

Some residents had asked for park closure during the Red Flag days. Chief Teile explained that it is not a decision to be made lightly and the last time she closed some parks during the extreme heat, the DA office called her and asked her why she did it, and that many people complained about it. Chief Teile further explained that she considers a combination of factors before making such a decision.

I sincerely thanked them on behalf of the community.