



CITY OF CHICO
BIDWELL PARK AND PLAYGROUND COMMISSION (BPPC)
NATURAL RESOURCE COMMITTEE
(Commissioners Haar and Smith-Peters)
Regular Meeting Agenda
January 20, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

REMOTE ONLINE MEETING VIA WebEx

Materials related to an item on this Agenda are available for public inspection in the Park Division Office at 965 Fir Street during normal business hours or online at <http://www.chico.ca.us/>.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

This meeting is being conducted via teleconference in accordance with Executive Order N-25-20 and N-29-20. Members of the public may virtually attend the meeting by using the City’s WebEx platform, by calling into the meeting, or by sending an email to the email address indicated below.

The public may listen to and/or participate in the Natural Resources Committee Meeting via computer, with both video and audio enabled, or through audio only via landline or mobile telephone.

*Emailed public comments will be accepted with the subject line **PUBLIC COMMENT ITEM _____**, sent to **parkpubliccomment@chicoca.gov** during the meeting prior to the close of public comment on an item. The public is encouraged not to send more than one email per item and not to comment on numerous items in one email. For any emails received during the meeting, the names of the people submitting the email will be read, but not the email itself. However, emails will become part of the public record and available to the public for review after the meeting.*

WebEx MEETING INFORMATION:

The public may use the following information to remotely view and participate in the BPPC Natural Resource Committee meeting online:

Event Name: **BPPC NATURAL RESOURCE COMMITTEE MEETING 1-20-2021**

Date/Time: Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 6:00 pm

WebEx Event URL: <https://chico.webex.com/chico/onstage/g.php?MTID=eedca60d422a76bca6edd2ddb78dd1e56>

Event #: 146 892 4690

Attendee Password: NRC210120 (Case Sensitive)

Call-in Number: 1-844-517-1442 Call-in Password: 146 892 4690

..



Please contact the Park Division Office at (530) 896-7800 if you require an agenda in an alternative format, or if you need to request a disability-related modification or accommodation. If possible, this request should be received at least three (3) days prior to the meeting.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

2. **REGULAR AGENDA**

2.1. **ACCEPTANCE OF PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT PROGRAMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE DRAFT VEGETATIVE FUELS MANAGEMENT PLAN.**

At its meeting on 12/14/20, the Bidwell Park & Playground Commission (BPPC) reviewed a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the City's proposed Draft Vegetative Fuels Management Plan. A Notice of Availability of the PEIR was issued on 12/18/20 which started the 45-day public comment period and announced an opportunity for the public to provide comments on the PEIR at the BPPC Natural Resource Committee meeting on 1/20/2021. *(Report – P&NRM Linda Herman).*

DRAFT PEIR DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY: The Draft PEIR is available for public review at the following locations: 1) City of Chico Parks Division, 965 Fir Street by appointment only, call 530-896-7800 to schedule an appointment; and 2) Chico Branch of the Butte County Library, 1108 Sherman Avenue, open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 pm. An electronic version of the Draft PEIR is also available on the City's web page at <https://chico.ca.us/post/vegetative-fuels-management-plan>

Recommendation: *The Committee will provide its comments, if any, on the PEIR and accept comments from the public. All comments received will be addressed in the Final PEIR and will not be discussed at this meeting.*

3. **BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR**

Members of the public may address the Committee at this time on any matter not already listed on the agenda, comments are limited to three minutes. The Committee cannot take any action at this meeting on requests made under this section of the agenda.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

Unless otherwise noticed, adjourn to the next regular meeting on February 17, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at a location or format to be determined based on COVID-19 status.



BPPC Natural Resource Committee Report

Meeting Date 1/20/21

DATE: 1/15/21
TO: BPPC Natural Resource Committee
FROM: Linda Herman, Park and Natural Resources Manager
SUBJECT: ACCEPTANCE OF PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT PROGRAMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE DRAFT VEGETATIVE FUELS MANAGEMENT PLAN.

REPORT IN BRIEF:

At its meeting on 12/14/20, the Bidwell Park & Playground Commission (BPPC) reviewed a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the City's proposed Draft Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (VFMP). A Notice of Availability of the PEIR was issued on 12/18/20 which started the 45-day public comment period and announced an opportunity for the public to provide comments on the PEIR at the BPPC Natural Resource Committee meeting on 1/20/2021.

Recommendation: *The Committee will provide its comments, if any, on the PEIR and accept comments from the public. All comments received will be addressed in the Final PEIR and will not be discussed at this meeting.*

FISCAL IMPACT:

With assistance from the Butte County Resource Conservation District (BCRCD), the City applied for and was awarded a \$158,907 Community Wildfire Prevention grant from Cal Fire to develop the VFMP. The grant does not include funding for the implementation of the VFMP, and the project specific environmental review and implementation of the proposed projects identified in the Plan. The City also pledged a local match of \$55,828 for a total project cost of \$214,735.

DISCUSSION:

Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (VFMP) Overview:

The VFMP outlines a framework for managing fuel loads and vegetation on City-owned properties to reduce the likelihood of a catastrophic wildfire and to promote the growth of noninvasive native vegetation. Implementation of the VFMP would involve thinning, pruning, grazing, prescribed burning, removal, herbicide use, and other modification of trees and vegetation within the VFMP areas. Appropriate vegetation management techniques to be employed at a specific site would be identified by the City during annual workplan development. These work plans would identify specific treatment types, area or properties to be treated, implementation timing, and other monitoring and tracking needs.

To minimize or mitigate impacts to resources in City parklands and greenways, the VFMP identifies Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) to be implemented during vegetation management activities and sets standards for desired conditions in different vegetation types. The VFMP also identifies and describes in detail several priority projects at specific locations. These priority projects serve as examples of the kinds of vegetation management activities the City contemplates in the future. A 3rd Draft of the VFMP is included as Appendix B in the PEIR in redlined form and is the draft being analyzed in the PEIR.

Programmatic Environmental Impact Report Overview:

The draft PEIR was developed by consultants from BCRCD, CSU, Chico Ecological Reserve, Deer Creek Resources, and Dempsey Vegetation Management. Additionally, cultural and biological experts and representatives from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Butte County Fire Safe Council helped develop the PEIR.

The PEIR is intended to serve as a program EIR, as defined by the State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15168, for the adoption and implementation of the City of Chico Vegetative Fuels Management Plan. All of the scenarios described in Section 15168 apply to the VFMP. Therefore, activities proposed in the VFMP receive general environmental review in the PEIR by analyzing their cumulative impacts as a program after considering their standard project requirements

(SPRs), and then identifying mitigation measures (if needed) that would be expected to reduce the environmental impacts below a threshold of significance.

The Draft PEIR indicates that there would be potentially significant impacts related to Biological and Hydrology/Water Quality resources, but these impacts would be less than significant with proposed mitigation measures. Impacts on the remaining environmental resources or issue areas would be nonexistent or insignificant. The project will not affect any sites enumerated under Section 65962.5 (Hazardous Sites) of the Government Code.

Due to the length of the PEIR, only Chapter 1 – Executive Summary is included with this report. The full PEIR and appendices are available on the City's website at: <https://chico.ca.us/post/vegetative-fuels-management-plan>. Hard copies are available for public review at the Butte County Library at 1108 Sherman Avenue, open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 pm., and the City of Chico Park Division Office at 965 Fir Street by appointment only.

Public Comment Period:

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, a Notice of Availability (NOA) (Attached as Attachment 2) requesting comments on the Draft PEIR was prepared. The NOA was circulated through the Butte County Recorder's Office and the State Clearinghouse (SCH # 2020090170) websites on December 18, 2020. This posting started the 45-day public comment period, **which will end at 5:00 p.m. on February 2, 2021.**

The NOA also announced a public meeting to be held at the 1/20/21 BPPC Natural Resource Committee meeting where verbal and emailed comments on the Draft PEIR will be accepted. Information on the availability of and how to access and review the PEIR and the public meeting date was also announced in a press release and advertised in the local newspaper.

At this NRC meeting, Staff will provide an overview of the VFMP and will note general themes of verbal and emailed comments received. All comments and questions received will be discussed and addressed in the Final PEIR. Staff strongly encourages the public to submit written comments to ensure that their specific comments are represented in the project record and addressed in the Final PEIR. Comments are to be sent to:

Linda Herman, P&NRM
City of Chico Park Division
P.O. Box 3420
Chico, CA 95927
Email: linda.herman@chicoca.gov

The public is asked to please be sure to include their name, address, email or telephone number with their comment.

Attachments:

- Attachment 1: Draft PEIR Executive Summary (Chapter 1)
- Attachment 2: Notice of Availability of the PEIR

I.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City of Chico is proposing to implement a comprehensive program of work known as Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (referred to as the “Plan” or “the VFMP” or “the program”) to protect lives and property and enhance natural resources in the City of Chico. The Plan covers all land owned and managed by the City, including parks, greenways, and open spaces (henceforth referred to collectively as “Chico parklands”). It identifies high fire hazard areas in greatest need of treatment, describes how fire can best be managed in each of Chico’s five main vegetation communities, and develops policies and actions focused on reducing the harmful impacts of wildfire in the community, while protecting and in many cases enhancing Chico’s natural resources, including by redressing the adverse effects of long-term fire suppression. The proposed Plan is attached as Appendix B. To analyze the environmental effects of implementing the Plan and its component projects and activities, the City has prepared this programmatic EIR (PEIR). The "project" under CEQA, analyzed by this PEIR, is the multi-year program of work described in the VFMP. This work was funded by a CAL FIRE Community Wildfire Protection Grant (5GA18210).

People involved in developing this Plan The Parks Manager has the authority to identify parkland areas within the City’s jurisdiction that are vulnerable to hazards, including fire, and to apply appropriate policies and strategies within these areas to protect life, property, and natural resources. In December, 2018, the Parks Manager submitted a grant to CAL FIRE to support VFMP development and environmental review. The grant agreement was executed summer 2019.

The VFMP was then developed by the City of Chico Public Works Department, Parks Division, with the help of numerous qualified consultants. The Butte County Resource Conservation District (BCRCD) provided project management and a wide range of environmental review services. The CSU, Chico Enterprise Foundation and the CSU, Chico Ecological Reserves provided a registered professional forester (RPF) experienced in designing ecological and effective fuels reduction activities; the Reserves also provided an intern who perform fuels surveys on City parcels scattered across the program area. Deer Creek GIS conducted a comprehensive LiDAR analysis of the program area, creating the most detailed and accurate digital vegetation layer ever developed for the City and generating a wildfire risk map that identifies the areas of greatest fire danger based on ladder fuels density, likely conditions during hazardous weather, and proximity to homes, among other factors. Dempsey Vegetation Management provided Plan design and review especially as it pertains to management of invasive species that pose a fuels risk.

The Plan was reviewed by the the Bidwell Park and Playgrounds Commission (BPPC) and by the public. Comments were incorporated. The revised Plan was reviewed by the BPPC and the public a second time. The BPPC is a seven-member board with the power and duty to operate and maintain all parks and playgrounds owned by the City; provide for the care of the trees and shrubbery on the streets and along the sidewalks of the City; and enter into leases and contracts for up to 15 years, among other duties (Charter Sec. 1006.1). Due to delays related to the COVID-19 crisis, several BPPC and Natural Resource Committee meetings were canceled in spring/summer

2020. However, the dates of VFMP review were as follows: the first-draft VFMP was reviewed by the BPPC on July 20, 2020 and an initial round of comments incorporated by staff before the BPPC voted to forward the second-draft Plan to the environmental review stage on August 31, 2020, initiating the preparation of this PEIR. After August 31, 2020, comments and suggestions on the Plan were still accepted and incorporated, including an additional Key Project being added (Project 7, Lower Park thinning) because studies and comments emphasized the urgency of this project. The “new” project consists of work that was already within the scope of the VFMP’s programmatic vegetation management work and does not represent new impacts.

Development of this PEIR The VFMP analyzed in this PEIR is a third draft. (This redlined draft is attached to this PEIR as Appendix B.) It was developed by the contributors listed in 5.0, “EIR Preparers”. Additionally, experts from the NRCS and the Butte County Fire Safe Council donated their time to help develop or review the Soils, Wildfire, Noise, and Utilities sections of this EIR.

Objectives and contents of the Plan The objective of the Plan is to establish and implement strategic management actions on City-owned lands to reduce the likelihood of unwanted ignitions in the wildland-urban interface; reduce the negative effects of parkland fires on structures, lives and natural resources; and create conditions under which fire, when it does occur, can have beneficial effects in Chico’s parkland ecosystems. To that end, the Plan identifies and characterizes the City’s existing high fire hazard areas, presents policies and management actions to reduce parkland fire hazards and impacts in each of the City’s five main vegetation communities, and provides a framework for seeking funds, coordinating efforts with agencies and private landowners, and prioritizing work efforts. Although the primary driver of the Plan is the need to improve wildfire safety, the City believes the Plan should and does enhance other values that are meaningful to Chico’s residents and visitors, including recreation values; community safety; Chico heritage and historic values; tribal cultural values; ecosystem services such as water supply, conveyance and quality; native biodiversity (i.e., parklands relatively free from invasive species); and habitat for wildlife (including agricultural pollinators) and wildflowers.

The City Public Works Department (Parks Division) will be responsible for implementing the management actions in the Plan, in cooperation with other City Departments, other fire-related agencies, individual landowners where applicable, and the general public. This DEIR serves as a program EIR, as defined by the State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15168, for adoption of the Plan. Adoption of the Plan and its program of work is the “project” evaluated by this PEIR. In other words, this PEIR analyzes what environmental impacts could result if the Plan were fully implemented, and it specifies how those impacts will be reduced to the lowest level possible.

The Plan outlines a suite of vegetation management methods (a “toolbox”) to reduce parkland fuel hazards. These methods will be applied to selected treatment areas on a case-by-case basis, not as a one-size-fits-all approach. The Parks Division has prioritized the areas to be treated based on the level of hazard. However, implementation of the vegetation management work is largely dependent upon funding. (Also, if the work would not be effective unless adjacent private property was also treated, then implementation could depend on private landowner permission). The Parks Division estimates that full implementation of the Plan will take 5 to 10 years. The Plan will not expire, although it can be modified as conditions and priorities change. Whether the Plan is modified by BPPC action in the future or not, future activities could require additional environmental review, an eventuality which is planned for in the structure of this PEIR and its attached Project Consistency Checklist

(Appendix A). There is no set term or expiration date associated with a Program EIR under CEQA.

Implementation of the proposed Plan will require formal adoption of the Plan and this PEIR by the Bidwell Park and Playgrounds Commission and the Chico City Council. Permits required for some future activities under the Plan are as follows:

- Burn permit and smoke management plan from the Butte County Air Quality Management District for prescribed burning of vegetative debris and landscape restoration units as proposed under the Plan;
- Burn permits from CAL FIRE for prescribed burning occurring in-season;
- A limited amount of work would occur in creeks; as such, a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSA or “1600” permit) would be required;
- Any and all vegetation management work outside of City-owned lands would require landowner permission, and the execution of a Letter of Agreement between the Division and the affected landowner(s).
- No 404 permit would be required under the Clean Water Act (CWA) because vegetation management activities adjacent to Waters of the U.S. would “involve only the cutting or removing of vegetation above the ground (e.g., mowing, rotary cutting, and chainsawing) where the activity neither substantially disturbs the root system nor involves mechanized pushing, dragging, or other similar activities that redeposit excavated soil material.” (CFR §232.2(2)(ii).)
- No formal consultation with USFWS or CDFW for take of endangered or threatened species would be required for projects within the scope of this EIR, because take would be avoided through programmatic mitigation measures and/or standard project requirements (SPRs), as specified in this EIR. Future activities will be reviewed for consistency with this EIR to determine whether they are (a) entirely within its scope or (b) require additional review.

I.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The City of Chico manages almost 6,400 acres -- fully ten square miles -- spanning a variety of vegetation communities, including grassland, riparian forest, Valley oak woodland, blue-oak-gray-pine woodlands, and the mixed oak-chaparral community known here as Upland Mix. All these vegetation communities, like the rest of the Sierra-Cascade foothills, are fire-adapted. That means each acre managed by the City needs fire in order to be optimally healthy, biodiverse, and safe to live in. Every vegetation community in Butte County has a native fire return interval: some shorter, some longer. If fire cannot be safely applied to these lands before their fire return interval runs out, then a fire surrogate will need to be applied in order to do some of the work fire would have done. Fire surrogates include almost any technique that reduces or kills vegetation, including hand cutting, mechanical mastication, grazing, mowing, or herbicide use.

A trait shared by fire and all fire surrogates is that a single entry (treatment) is not enough. Follow-up treatments (i.e., maintenance) are crucial to keeping land healthy. This work is never done. The ongoing nature of vegetation management work makes it a *program* of work, not merely a collection of projects. Therefore, it is best reviewed and authorized as a program. Adoption of the VFMP and implementation of its program of work is the Project analyzed in this PEIR.

1.2.1 Programmatic Vegetation Management on City Lands

This EIR serves as a program EIR, as defined by the State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15168, for adoption and implementation of the City of Chico Vegetative Fuels Management Plan. Activities proposed in the Plan receive general environmental review in this EIR, e.g. analyzing their cumulative impacts as a program after considering their standard project requirements, and then spelling out mitigation measures (if needed) that would be expected to reduce their environmental impacts below a threshold of significance based on the particular resources known or expected to be found in the treatment areas.

Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines describes the procedural approach to the use of program EIRs. It states that a program EIR may be prepared on series of actions that can be characterized as one large project or program and are related either:

- (1) geographically,
- (2) as logical parts in a chain of contemplated actions,
- (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or
- (4) As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar way(s).

All of the scenarios described in Section 15168 apply to the VFMP. The VFMP identifies proposed management activities and facility improvements geographically located on City-owned parklands and open space. The Plan approval is the first in a sequence of contemplated actions, followed by subsequent approvals to implement the proposed Projects and other future activities consistent with the VFMP. These future projects or activities, as they are designed, will undergo additional, site-specific review pursuant to CEQA. If the City finds that a future activity would have effects that were not examined in this program EIR, a new initial study would need to be prepared leading to either an EIR or a negative declaration. If, however, the City finds that pursuant to CEQA Guidelines §15162, no new effects could occur or no new mitigation measures would be required, then the City can approve the activity as being within the scope of the program EIR, and no new environmental document would be required (§15168(c)(1) and (2)).

To determine whether future activities in the VFMP are really within the scope of this PEIR, additional surveys and impact analyses will still be needed. Based on the results of these analyses, new impacts not covered in this PEIR could be identified, and new mitigation measures could be needed. If so, new environmental documents under CEQA would be required before implementation of those activities. To determine whether a future activity/project is entirely or partially within the scope of this PEIR or not, the City will use the Project Consistency Checklist attached in Appendix A.

The Plan would involve reducing the amount of flammable vegetation within designated areas of City-owned lands. Some areas would see a 90% reduction, similar to what could be experienced after a wildfire (e.g., certain very overgrown brushy corridors along evacuation routes or surrounding legacy black oaks in Upper Park). Other areas would see about a 40% reduction (e.g., many denser riparian corridors, where invasives would be removed before any native vegetation is removed). A large majority of acres would see no reduction (e.g., most grassland and blue oak-gray

pine areas most years). The objectives and method of vegetation management (both first entries and follow-up treatments) would be selected from the menus of tools and techniques described in section 4 of the VFMP and summarized below in 2.2.

1.2.2 The Key Projects

As a deliverable of the CAL FIRE grant, the Plan also contains seven key Projects which are high priorities for the City and stakeholders. Making these projects “shovel-ready” (i.e., fully reviewed and permitted) was one of the goals of the grant. Therefore, these seven projects have received more detailed planning, mapping, and/or resource surveys using funding from this grant.

However, site-specific biological resources and cultural resources surveys sufficient for defining project-level environmental effects for these seven projects have, in most cases, not been completed at the time of this DEIR release. (Continuing to develop these surveys is within the scope of the CAL FIRE grant and the Parks Division will continue to use that funding to develop these surveys through mid spring 2021.) Therefore, this EIR serves as a program EIR for the seven Key Projects. Programmatic mitigation measures for these projects are included in the PEIR for those resource topics where implementation of the proposed projects could result in potentially significant impacts before mitigation. These mitigation measures, if they are found to apply, are to be implemented prior to or as part of approval of the final design or alignment and implementation of these projects. After more detailed planning and design of the projects are completed and the projects are considered for implementation by the City, they will undergo additional review, consistent with Section 15168(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines. They will be reviewed in light of the information in the program EIR. If a detailed analysis using the Project Consistency Checklist can document that their impacts are within the scope of the information in the program EIR, additional environmental documentation will not be necessary. If new effects are identified that were not addressed in the program EIR, the Project Consistency Checklist would then serve as an Initial Study to determine the appropriate environmental documentation the City would need to prepare.

Finally, for the 7 Key Projects and indeed any future activities under this PEIR, it's important to note most areas will still receive some last-minute surveys right before implementation: for example, nesting bird surveys must be conducted within 30 days of implementation start.

There is no expectation that the seven projects will be implemented “in order” or that one will need to be completed before another can begin or before programmatic vegetation management (i.e., vegetation management that is not associated with a “key project”) can proceed.

1.2.3 Vegetation Management in Cooperation with Private Landowners

Sometimes, vegetation management objectives cannot be completed without the cooperation of neighboring landowners. This is particularly true of arundo eradication efforts along creeks. Arundo (*Arundo donax* or giant reed) is a highly flammable invasive weed which spreads easily by rhizome or fragment and quickly grows to 10-15' high walls of vegetation which will readily burn even when green. While all vegetation has some potential to act as fuel for fires, arundo is considerably more flammable and volatile than the native streamside vegetation, e.g. willow and mulefat, it often crowds out. Arundo cannot be effectively eradicated from a City-managed stream channel as long as it is harbored on privately managed parcels that are adjacent to, or upstream from, City-managed lands. Therefore, this EIR analyzes the likely environmental effects of addressing and removing arundo on some private lands. Even though agreements have not yet been developed or executed with most private landowners who would be eligible to participate, it is appropriate to review the cumulative or general impacts from performing this work on private lands and to develop standard project requirements and/or mitigation and monitoring measures to reduce the likely effects of this work below thresholds of environmental significance.

I.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS

I.3.1 Less than significant impacts

In section 4 of this PEIR, preparers analyzed the environmental impacts of fully implementing the Plan. This analysis, similar to the analysis commonly performed in an Initial Study (IS), determined that either no impact, or no significant impact, would occur related to the following environmental resources or issue areas:

- Air quality – emission related impacts associated with vegetation management (e.g., chain saws, chippers, smoke) would be minor, temporary, and less than significant.
- Aesthetics - the impacts on scenic views would be less than significant or would be beneficial.
- Agriculture – the proposed Plan would have no impact on agricultural activities or on timberland.
- Cultural resources - surveys and design features built into the program would sufficiently protect cultural, historical and archaeological resources.
- Energy - the program would not use energy wastefully or in conflict with an adopted energy efficiency plan.
- Geology and Soils – the proposed Plan would not affect, or be affected by, geological hazards such as seismic ground shaking, fault rupture, landslides, or subsidence.
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions - the project’s influence on the production or sequestration of greenhouse gases in the area would not be significant or adverse and would not conflict with an adopted greenhouse gas reduction or climate resilience plan.
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials – design features built into the program would sufficiently prevent the release of hazardous substances and would not expose the public to health hazards
- Land Use and Planning – the proposed Plan would not alter existing land uses nor would it conflict with City General Plan policies
- Mineral Resources - the program would not cause any change in the availability of any mineral resource
- Noise – noise impacts related to vegetation management (i.e., chain saws, chippers) would be temporary, localized, and less than significant
- Population and housing – implementation of the Plan would not affect population growth

or available housing

- Public services – implementation of the Plan would not significantly affect the amount and availability of fire, police, school, or park services
- Recreation - implementation of the Plan would neither develop new recreational opportunities or infrastructure that could harm the environment, nor will it have a significant adverse impact on existing recreational opportunities or infrastructure
- Transportation - implementation of the Plan would not have a significant adverse impact on existing transportation networks, access, or evacuation; the impact of additional traffic or delays associated with work crews performing vegetation management near local roadways and intersections would be minor and localized
- Tribal Cultural Resources- surveys and design features built into the program would provide a clear and explicit framework for government-to-government collaboration between the City and local Tribes to sufficiently protect tribal cultural resources.
- Utilities and service systems – the Plan would not significantly affect, or cause a significant demand for, water supply, waste treatment, wastewater treatment, or drainage facilities

1.3.2 Potentially significant impacts that can be mitigated to below a level of significance

The City’s analysis determined that implementation of the Plan over many years could result in a potentially significant impact related to the following environmental resources or issue areas, but that these impacts could be mitigated to below a level of significance:

- Biological Resources - Although it is not expected, direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to special-status plant or wildlife species could occur from Plan implementation activities and/or the habitat alterations resulting from them. Therefore, a framework for compensatory mitigation has been developed (**MM-BIO-1**) that would (with CDFW and/or USFWS concurrence) reduce these impacts to below a level of significance. If compensatory mitigation was not feasible to offset significant biological impacts of a future activity, then that future activity would not be under the scope of this PEIR and a new EIR would be required for that activity.
- Hydrology and Water Quality - Removing all the vegetation in a streamside area can result in bank instability. In most streamside areas, the Plan would not remove all or even most vegetation. However, in parts of the Little Chico Creek greenway, *Arundo donax* may be the only streamside vegetation or could be the only streamside vegetation by the time implementation begins. If work removes all the *Arundo donax*, it could possibly result in eventual instability of the bank that causes hydrological impacts after the *Arundo donax* root ball dies and begins to separate from the soil. To reduce this impact to below a level of significance, while also avoiding the area’s re-colonization by weeds that present a relatively

high fire hazard, a low-density riparian revegetation mitigation measure has been developed (**MM-HYDRO-1**). Because streamside work needs to be carried out under the terms of a 1600 permit from CDFW (**SPR BIO-10**) as well as potentially an encroachment permit from CVFPB, this mitigation measure would still need to be reviewed by CDFW and potentially CVFPB. If CDFW and/or CVFPB stipulated more stringent mitigation measures, those agencies' mitigation measures would be applied.

I.3.3 Cumulative impacts and potentially significant impacts remaining after mitigation

The proposed Plan represents a long-term program that affects a wide geographic area in the City of Chico. Impacts would be dispersed over time and space. The impacts of the program have the potential to interact and combine with similar impacts from other land disturbing actions in and around the City, such as residential land development on individual lots, small subdivisions, road and other infrastructure improvements, flood control channel maintenance, and discretionary land development projects in the unincorporated portions of the County surrounding the City. The proposed Plan has the potential to overlap in time, and in effect, with these other types of projects, resulting in potential cumulatively significant impacts to biological resources, as described above. Cumulative impacts related to other resource areas are not expected to be significant.

After mitigation, the City concludes that no cumulative impacts nor potentially significant impacts would remain.

I.3.4 Significant unavoidable impacts and irreversible impacts.

Because the "project" in this case is approval of a Plan, CEQA requires the City to disclose any significant unavoidable impacts and any significant impacts that would be irreversible (§21100(b)(2)). Since the City finds no significant impacts would remain after mitigation, there are no irreversible nor unavoidable significant effects.

I.3.5 Growth inducing impacts

The proposed program would not result in any growth inducing impacts.

<p style="text-align: center;">Table 1 - Key to Impact Levels</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NI = No Impact LTS = Less than significant PS = Potentially significant</p> <p style="text-align: center;">LTSM = Less than significant with Mitigation SU = Significant and unavoidable</p>			
4.4 Biological Resources			
Impact	Significance Before Mitigation	Mitigation Measure	Significance After Mitigation
<p>Impact BIO-a: Project activities could have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, or through cumulative impacts, on a <i>wildlife</i> species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.</p>	PS	<p>Mitigation Measure BIO-1a: <i>Compensatory Mitigation to Special-Status Wildlife, If Applicable</i></p> <p>If the provisions of SPR BIO-5a cannot be implemented and additional mitigation is necessary to reduce significant impacts, the project proponent will compensate for such impacts to species or habitat by acquiring and/or protecting land that provides (or will provide in the case of restoration) habitat function for affected species that is at least equivalent to the habitat function removed or degraded as a result of the treatment. Compensation may include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Preserving existing habitat outside of the treatment area in perpetuity; this may entail purchasing mitigation credits and/or lands from a CDFW- or USFWS-approved entity in sufficient quantity to offset the residual significant impacts, generally at a ratio of 1:1 for habitat; and/or 2.) Restoring or enhancing existing habitat within the treatment area or outside of the treatment area (including decommissioning roads, adding perching structures, removing existing perching structures, or removing existing movement barriers or other existing features that are adversely affecting the species), and/or 3.) In lieu of the measures described above, compensatory mitigation may be satisfied through compliance with permit conditions, or other authorizations obtained by the project proponent (e.g., incidental take permit, if required), if these requirements are equally or more effective than the mitigation identified above. <p>The project proponent will prepare a Compensatory Mitigation Plan that identifies the residual significant effects that require compensatory mitigation and describes the compensatory mitigation strategy being implemented to reduce residual effects. The project proponent will consult with CDFW and/or any other applicable responsible agency prior to finalizing the Compensatory Mitigation Plan in order to satisfy that responsible agency's requirements (e.g., permits, approvals) within the plan. For species listed under ESA or CESA, the project proponent will submit the mitigation plan to CDFW and/or USFWS for review and comment. For other special-status wildlife species (not listed under ESA or CESA) the project proponent may consult with CDFW and/or USFWS regarding the availability and applicability of compensatory mitigation and other related technical information. The Compensatory Mitigation Plan will include:</p> <p>For preserving existing habitat outside of the treatment area in perpetuity, a summary of the proposed compensation lands (e.g., the number and type of credits, location of mitigation bank or easement), parties responsible for the long-term management of the land, and the legal and funding mechanisms for long-term conservation (e.g., holder of conservation easement or fee title). The project proponent will submit evidence that the necessary mitigation has been implemented or that the project proponent has entered into a legal agreement to implement it and that compensatory habitat will be preserved in perpetuity.</p> <p>For restoring or enhancing habitat within the treatment area or outside of the treatment area, a description of the proposed habitat improvements, success criteria that demonstrate the performance standard of maintained habitat function has been met, legal and funding mechanisms, and parties responsible for long-term management and monitoring of the restored habitat. If the loss of occupied habitat cannot be offset, and as a result treatment activities would substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of listed wildlife species, then the treatment will not qualify as within the scope of this PEIR.</p>	LTSM

4.4 Biological Resources

<p>Impact BIO-a: Project activities could have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, or through cumulative impacts, on a <i>plant</i> species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.</p>	<p>PS</p>	<p>Mitigation Measure BIO-1b: <i>Compensatory Mitigation to Special-Status Plants, If Applicable</i> If the provisions of SPR BIO-5b cannot be implemented and additional mitigation is necessary to reduce significant impacts, the project proponent will compensate for such impacts to species or habitat by acquiring and/or protecting land that provides (or will provide in the case of restoration) habitat function for affected species that is at least equivalent to the habitat function removed or degraded as a result of the treatment. Compensation may include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Preserving and enhancing existing populations outside of the treatment area in perpetuity (first priority). If that is not an option because existing populations that can be preserved in perpetuity are not available, 2.) Creating populations on mitigation sites outside of the treatment area through seed collection and dispersal (annual species) or transplantation (perennial species) and/or <p>Purchasing mitigation credits from a CDFW- or USFWS-approved conservation or mitigation bank in sufficient quantities to offset the loss of occupied habitat; and/or</p> <p>If the affected special-status plants are not listed under ESA or CESA, compensatory mitigation may include restoring or enhancing degraded habitats so that they are made suitable to support special-status plant species in the future.</p> <p>Finally, in lieu of the measures described above, compensatory mitigation may be satisfied through compliance with permit conditions, or other authorizations obtained by the project proponent (e.g., incidental take permit for state-listed plants), if these requirements are equally or more effective than the mitigation identified above.</p> <p>The project proponent will prepare a Compensatory Mitigation Plan that identifies the residual significant impacts that require compensatory mitigation and describes the compensatory mitigation strategy being implemented and how unavoidable losses of special-status plants will be compensated. The project proponent will consult with CDFW and/or any other applicable responsible agency prior to finalizing the Compensatory Mitigation Plan to satisfy that responsible agency's requirements (e.g., permits, approvals) within the plan. If the special-status plant taxa are listed under ESA or CESA, the plan will be submitted to CDFW and/or USFWS (as appropriate) for review and comment. The Compensatory Mitigation Plan will include: (continued on next page)</p>	<p>LTSM</p>
--	-----------	---	-------------



**PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE**

965 Fir Street
P.O. Box 3420
Chico, CA 95927-3420

(530) 896-7800 or (530) 894-4200
Fax (530) 895-2634
<http://www.Chicoca.gov>

**NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY
DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
CITY OF CHICO VEGETATIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN
(SCH # 2020090170)**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the City of Chico (the "City"), acting as lead agency, has prepared a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (Draft PEIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to assess the potential environmental effects of the proposed City of Chico Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (VFMP or Plan)

The City of Chico has established a minimum 45-day public review for the Draft PEIR which begins on December 18, 2020 and ends on February 2, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Interested parties are invited to provide comments on the Draft EIR prior to the end of the public review period. **Comments on the Draft PEIR may be submitted to the City of Chico Parks Division, Attn: Park & Natural Resources Manager, PO Box 3420, Chico, CA 95927 or emailed to linda.herman@chicoca.gov.** If you have any questions or desire additional information, you may contact Park & Natural Resources Manager Linda Herman at (530) 896-7241.

PROJECT LOCATION: The areas included within the VFMP encompass City-owned parcels located within City limits (i.e., all City-owned parcels other than the City's water and sewage treatment plant). Specifically, as shown in attached **Figure 1**, the VFMP Area includes: 274 City-owned parcels, ranging in size from <0.1 acres to >1,000 acres and totaling about 6,400 acres. The main parks, recreational and open space areas discussed in the VFMP are as follows: Bidwell Park (Upper, Middle, Lower and Lost), Lindo Channel, Verbena Fields, Teichert Ponds, Airport Open Space, Bidwell Ranch, Foothill Preserve, various South Chico preserved properties, and the greenways along Little Chico Creek, Bidwell Avenue, Comanche Creek, Dead Horse Slough, and Butte Creek Diversion Channel. The VFMP does not address CARD-owned properties or the Chico urban forest (street trees).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The City has determined that there are areas within Chico that are at high risk of wildfire, and that vegetation management/fuels reduction will significantly reduce destructive wildfire risk. The VFMP outlines a framework for managing fuel loads and vegetation on City-owned properties to reduce the likelihood of a catastrophic wildfire. Implementation of the VFMP would involve thinning, pruning, grazing, prescribed burning, removal, herbicide use, and other modification of trees and vegetation within the VFMP area to reduce the likelihood of a wildfire occurring and to minimize/slow the spread of a wildfire should one occur. Appropriate vegetation management techniques to be employed at a specific site would be identified by the City during annual workplan development. These work plans would identify specific treatment types, area or properties to be treated, implementation timing, and other monitoring and tracking needs. To minimize or mitigate impacts to resources in City parklands and greenways, the VFMP identifies Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) to be implemented during vegetation management activities and sets standards for desired conditions in different vegetation types. The VFMP also identifies and describes in detail several priority projects at specific locations. These priority projects serve as examples of the kinds of vegetation management activities the City contemplates in the future.

ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS: The Draft PEIR indicates that there would be potentially significant impacts related to Biological and Hydrology/Water Quality resources, but these impacts would be less than significant with proposed mitigation measures. Impacts on the remaining environmental resources or issue areas would be nonexistent or insignificant. The project will not affect any sites enumerated under Section 65962.5 (Hazardous Sites) of the Government Code.

DRAFT PEIR DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY: The Draft PEIR is available for public review at the following locations: 1) City of Chico Parks Division, 965 Fir Street by appointment only, call 530-896-7800 to schedule an appointment; and 2) Chico Branch of the Butte County Library, 1108 Sherman Avenue, open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 pm. An electronic version of the Draft PEIR is also available on the City's web page at: <https://chico.ca.us/post/vegetative-fuels-management-plan>

PUBLIC HEARING: As a result of the expanding outbreak of COVID-19 and restrictions placed on in-person gatherings, the City will host an online public session to receive comments on the Draft PEIR and the Draft Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (VFMP), rather than an in-person event. The online public session will be held on Wednesday, January 20, 2021, from 6:00 p.m. as part of the Bidwell Park & Playground Commission's Natural Resource Committee meeting.

To participate in the online public meeting, visit the city website at <https://chico.ca.us/post/2020-agendas> and click on the 1/20/21 Bidwell Park & Playground Commission Natural Resource Committee Meeting agenda for login information.

The meeting will begin with a project overview. Verbal and emailed comments on the Draft PEIR will also be accepted during the meeting. Staff will note general themes of verbal and emailed comments made and will address those in the Final PEIR, however, staff encourages the public to submit written comments to ensure that their specific comments are represented in the project record and addressed in the Final PEIR. Please be sure to include your name, address, email or telephone number with your comment.

Please send written comments to the following addresses:

Linda Herman, P&NRM
City of Chico Park Division
P.O. Box 3420
Chico, CA 95927
Email: linda.herman@chicoca.gov

Date: December 18, 2020

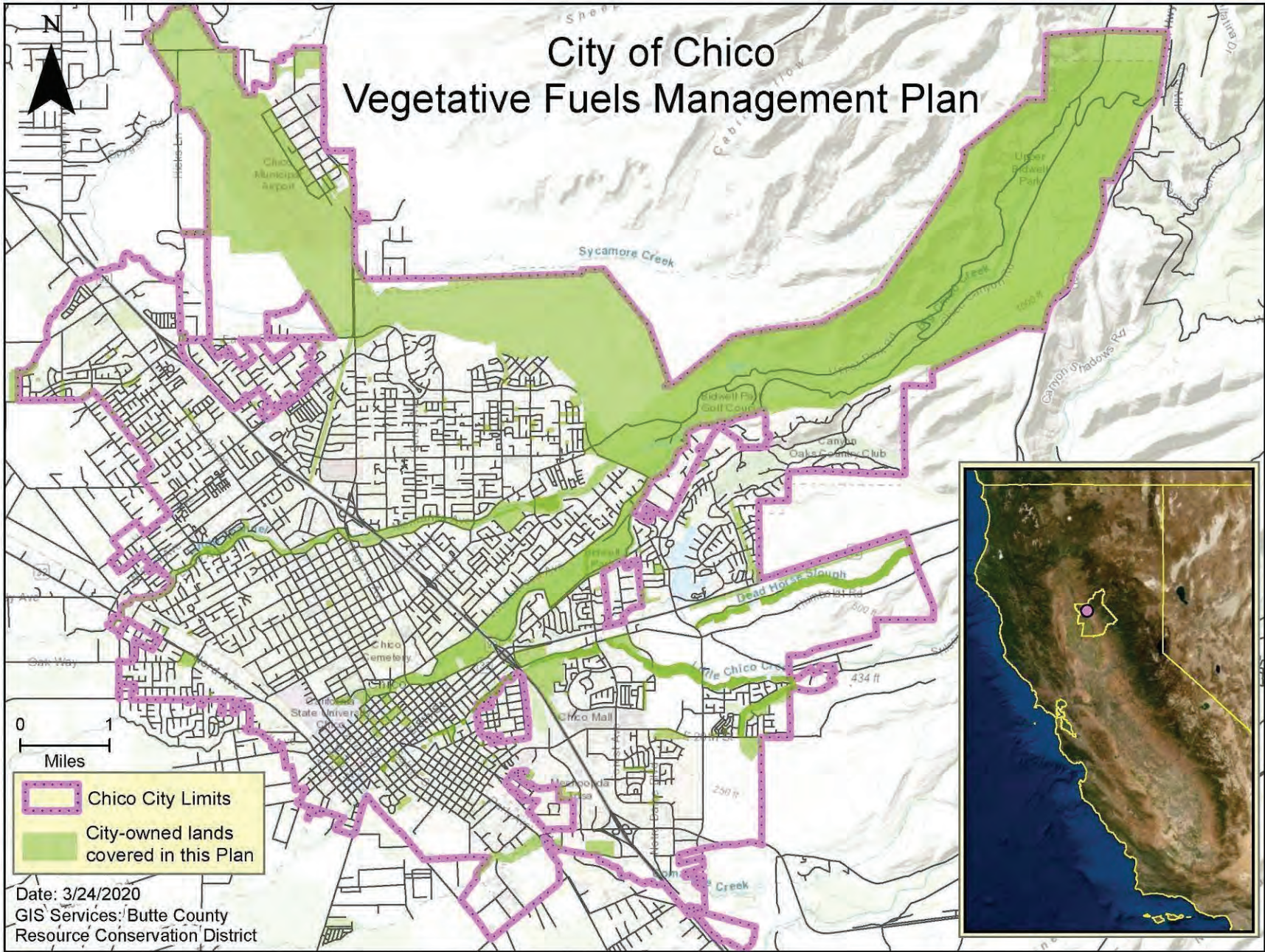


Figure 1: Lands addressed in this Plan.