

BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

P.O. Box 944246
 SACRAMENTO, CA 94244-2460
 Website: www.bof.fire.ca.gov
 (916) 653-8007

FILED

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 INYO CO. CLERK
 KAMMIFOOTTE, CLERK

BY

DEPUTY



April 1, 2016

Re: Notice of Availability of a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report Regarding the Proposed Statewide Vegetation Treatment Program

To Interested Parties:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board), as lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), is making available a draft program environmental impact report (PEIR) for public review. The Board has prepared this PEIR to provide the public, responsible agencies, and trustee agencies with information about the potential environmental effects of the proposed Vegetation Treatment Program (VTP). This PEIR was prepared in compliance with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR] title 14, section 15000, et seq.). The Board hereby invites comments on the adequacy and completeness of the environmental analyses in the VTP PEIR.

PROGRAM LOCATION: The mission of the Board includes developing policies and programs that implement a fire protection system that protects the people of California. To accomplish this mission, the Board proposes the implementation of the VTP to reduce the wildland fuel threat on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands and restore economically and environmentally sustainable range landscapes.

The SRA is the land in California where the state has the financial responsibility for the prevention and suppression of wildfires. (Pub. Resources Code, §§ 4102, 4125.) The SRA landscape consists of approximately 31 million acres across California that include lands covered wholly or in part by forests or are principally used for range or forage purposes. (Pub. Resources Code, § 4126.) The VTP allows for the implementation of specific vegetation treatment projects at appropriate locations and scales in the SRA to meet the VTP's objectives for fire prevention, fire protection, and/or ecological restoration. Proposed VTP activities are limited to approximately 22 million acres in the SRA (see Figure 1 at the end of this Notice). Vegetation treatment activities will be implemented primarily on privately owned land within the SRA, and only on a voluntary basis.

Table 1. Approximate annual acres treated in each bioregion. See Chapter 2.

Bioregion	Approximate Annual Acreage Treated
Bay Area/Delta	5,855
Central Coast	8,904
Colorado Desert	988
Klamath/North Coast	11,650
Modoc	7,175
Mojave	2,573
Sacramento Valley	2,364
San Joaquin Valley	1,877
Sierra Nevada	13,411
South Coast	5,204
Total by Treatment	60,000

It is anticipated that treatments under the proposed VTP will take place on approximately 60,000 acres per year, less than 2% of the SRA landscape. Because this program depends on willing landowners, available funding, and available treatment days, it is expected that fewer acres than 60,000 will be treated per year and that the number of acres treated each year will vary. Those limiting factors also make it impossible to determine in advance exactly where the state treatments will take place. However, this PEIR has extrapolated historical treatment data and other attributes to estimate treatment acres by bioregion (see Table 1). This PEIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts that may occur from undertaking the VTP at this scale, and identifies project level limitations and mitigation measures that will minimize any impacts.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: A combination of manmade and natural factors has led to a situation where wildfire acreage, fire suppression cost, and losses of residential structures have *The Board's mission is to lead California in developing policies and programs that serve the public interest in environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable management of forest and rangelands, and a fire protection system that protects and serves the people of the state.*

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increased dramatically in the past three decades. A problem of this magnitude goes beyond jurisdictional boundaries and requires a statewide strategy. An overarching goal of vegetation treatments is to alter fire behavior and reduce harmful effects. However, California displays astonishing diversity in plant, animal, and social systems and, without proper design, the statewide planning and implementation of vegetation treatments can potentially come with significant costs. To this end, the VTP PEIR lays out a framework for prioritizing, planning, implementing, and monitoring fuel treatments across the SRA.

To attain the objectives of the VTP at a state-wide scale, the VTP organizes treatments into three general types:

- Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI): treatments will be focused in WUI-designated areas, and generally consist of fuel reduction to prevent the spread of fire between wildlands and structures, or vice versa.
- Fuel Breaks: strategically placed vegetation treatments that actively support fire control activities.
- Ecological Restoration: projects will generally occur outside the WUI in areas that have departed from the natural fire regime as a result of fire exclusion. Ecological restoration treatments will focus on restoring ecosystem resiliency by moderating uncharacteristic wildland fuel conditions to reflect historic vegetative composition and structure, including cultural landscapes.

Allowable treatment activities under the VTP include prescribed fire, manual activities (i.e., hand crew work), mechanical activities, prescribed herbivory (targeted beneficial grazing), and targeted ground application of herbicides. These activities will be used singularly or in combination depending upon the treatment type (i.e., WUI, fuel break, or ecological restoration) and environmental considerations.

Similar projects are currently undertaken by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) as part of the existing Vegetation Management Program (VMP), the Fire Prevention Program, and the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP). Each of these statewide programs are ongoing and implemented through a separate CEQA process. The VTP is part of this comprehensive fire prevention strategy from the Board that is implemented by CAL FIRE. This program intends to lower the risk of damaging wildfires on nonfederal lands by managing vegetation to modify and/or reduce hazardous fuels. The key objectives of this program are to prevent loss of lives and property, reduce fire suppression costs, and protect natural resources from damaging wildfire through the use of appropriate vegetation treatments. It is important to acknowledge that the VTP is not meant to resolve all hazardous fuel conditions but rather provide a tool to address them on a voluntary basis for all stakeholders within and associated with the SRA.

This PEIR would govern project-scale decision making under the VTP and is intended to provide CEQA compliance for projects implemented under the VTP. CAL FIRE would use this PEIR in deciding whether to approve, approve with project specific requirements, or deny proposed individual projects. This PEIR provides Standard Project Requirements (SPRs) and mitigation measures using the most current technology and scientific information to avoid significant environmental impacts. Use of the PEIR to facilitate CEQA compliance for these individual projects enables CAL FIRE to utilize a consistent implementation process, including public participation, to develop projects that best meet the objectives of the VTP while avoiding significant environmental impacts.

The below Table 2 summarizes the environmental impacts from the proposed VTP. With the application of SPRs and mitigation measures, the proposed VTP demonstrates no significant environmental impacts. The environmental analysis is in Chapter 4 and the cumulative effects analysis is in Chapter 5.

(continued)

Table 2. Impact Summary Analysis and Reference Locations.

Impact Summary Analysis and Reference Locations.				
Environmental Review Resource Area	Reference Location			
	Resource impacts determined to be Significant	Significance Criteria	Threshold Criteria	Mitigation and/or Standard Project Requirement
Biological Resources	N	4-98	4-99	4-139, 5-27, 5-29-31, 5-40-45, 5-80
Geology, Hydrology, and Soils	N	4-187	4-187	4-203, 5-47, 5-50, 5-80
Hazardous Materials	N	4-216	4-216	4-225, 5-42, 5-55
Water Quality	N	4-252	4-252	4-203, 5-30, 5-42, 5-46, 5-54, 5-57, 5-80
Archeological, Cultural and Historic Resources	N	4-281	4-282	4-294, 5-60
Noise	N	4-297	4-298	4-304, 5-43, 5-62
Recreation	N	4-307	4-308	NM
Utilities and Energy	N	4-319	4-319	NM
Transportation and Traffic	N	4-323	4-323	4-326, 5-71, 5-75
Population, Employment, Housing, & Socio-economic Wellbeing	N	4-339	4-339	NM
Air Quality	N*	4-362	4-363	4-379, 5-75
Aesthetics and Visual Resources	N	4-384	4-385	NM
Climate Change	N	4-401	4-402	4-413, 5-80

* - No significance after mitigation is applied.
 NM - No mitigations were needed.

DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY: The VTP PEIR is available for download from the Board's website: [http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_committees/resource_protection_committee/current_projects/vegetation_treatment_program_environmental_impact_report_\(vtpeir\)/](http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_committees/resource_protection_committee/current_projects/vegetation_treatment_program_environmental_impact_report_(vtpeir)/)

Hard copies of the VTP PEIR can be reviewed at the Board's office in Sacramento (address below). To arrange to view documents at Board offices during business hours, call (916) 653-2928. The document can also be reviewed at libraries throughout the state; for a full list of locations, refer to the VTP website. CDs or printed copies are available at cost on request by phoning (916) 653-2928 or emailing VegetationTreatment@bof.ca.gov. Copies will also be available for review only at any regularly scheduled Board meeting where the VTP PEIR is on the noticed agenda.

PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD: The PEIR is available for a 60-day public review and comment period, which begins April 1, 2016 and ends at 5pm on May 31, 2016. **Please send comments on the PEIR at the earliest possible date, but postmarked no later than 5pm on May 31, 2016 in order for your comments to be considered.**

Written comments are preferred via email and may be submitted to VegetationTreatment@bof.ca.gov. Emailed comments should include your name, address, and daytime telephone number so a representative of the Board can contact you if clarifications regarding your comments are required.

Comments may also be mailed to the following address:

Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
ATTN: Edith Hannigan, Board Analyst
VTP Draft PEIR Comments
PO Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official public record. A Final PEIR will be prepared which will include responses to comments received during the public review period.

Sincerely,



Matt Dias
Acting Executive Officer, Board of Forestry & Fire Protection

Locations where PEIR can be reviewed:

Online:

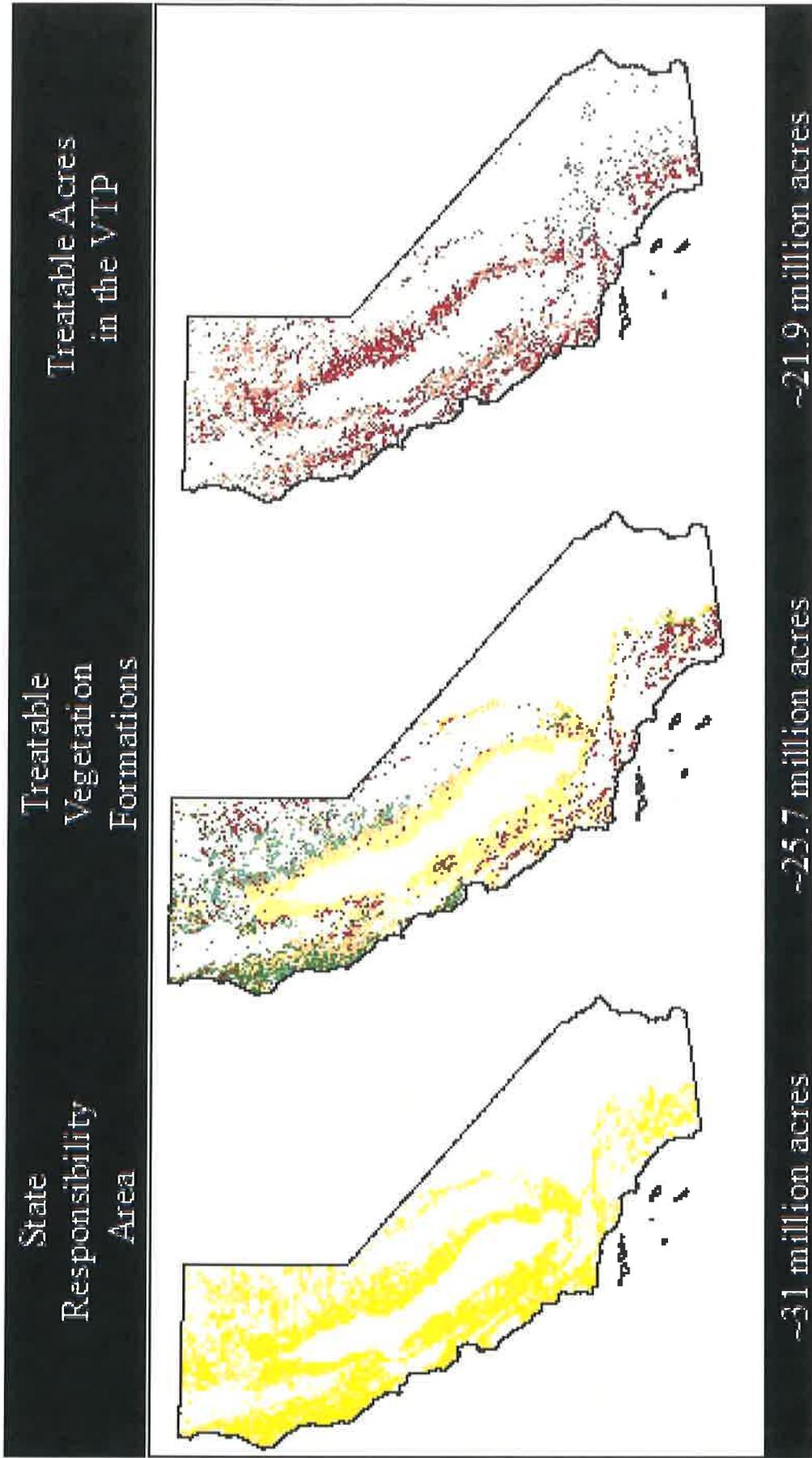
[http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_committees/resource_protection_committee/current_projects/vegetation_treatment_program_environmental_impact_report_\(vtpeir\)/](http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_committees/resource_protection_committee/current_projects/vegetation_treatment_program_environmental_impact_report_(vtpeir)/)

California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, 1416 9th Street, Sacramento, CA 95816 (by appointment during normal business hours; please call (916) 653-2928 in advance)

Libraries throughout the state; see VTP PEIR website for a list of locations

[http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_committees/resource_protection_committee/current_projects/vegetation_treatment_program_environmental_impact_report_\(vtpeir\)/](http://bofdata.fire.ca.gov/board_committees/resource_protection_committee/current_projects/vegetation_treatment_program_environmental_impact_report_(vtpeir)/)

Figure 1. Treatable acres under the VTP. Further discussion of the treatable acres is found in Chapter 2 of the Draft PEIR.



Notice of Completion & Environmental Document Transmittal

Mail to: State Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 3044, Sacramento, CA 95812-3044 (916) 445-0613
For Hand Delivery/Street Address: 1400 Tenth Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

SCH # 2005082054

Project Title: Vegetation Treatment Program (VTP)

Lead Agency: California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection Contact Person: Edith Hannigan
Mailing Address: PO Box 944246 Phone: (916) 653-8007
City: Sacramento Zip: 94244-2460 County: Sacramento

Project Location: County: Statewide City/Nearest Community: Comm. near wildlands on nonfederal land

Cross Streets: Zip Code:

Longitude/Latitude (degrees, minutes and seconds): Total Acres:

Assessor's Parcel No.: Section: Twp.: Range: Base:

Within 2 Miles: State Hwy #: Waterways:

Airports: Railways: Schools:

Document Type:

- CEQA: [] NOP [x] Draft EIR NEPA: [] NOI Other: [] Joint Document
[] Early Cons [] Supplement/Subsequent EIR [] EA [] Final Document
[] Neg Dec (Prior SCH No.) [] Draft EIS [] Other:
[] Mit Neg Dec Other:

Local Action Type:

- [] General Plan Update [] Specific Plan [] Rezone [] Annexation
[] General Plan Amendment [] Master Plan [] Prezone [] Redevelopment
[] General Plan Element [] Planned Unit Development [] Use Permit [] Coastal Permit
[] Community Plan [] Site Plan [] Land Division (Subdivision, etc.) [] Other:

Development Type:

- [] Residential: Units Acres
[] Office: Sq.ft. Acres Employees
[] Commercial: Sq.ft. Acres Employees
[] Industrial: Sq.ft. Acres Employees
[] Educational:
[] Recreational:
[] Water Facilities: Type MGD
[] Transportation: Type
[] Mining: Mineral
[] Power: Type MW
[] Waste Treatment: Type MGD
[] Hazardous Waste: Type
[x] Other: Reduce wildland fuel & restore native ecosystems

Project Issues Discussed in Document:

- [x] Aesthetic/Visual [] Fiscal [x] Recreation/Parks [x] Vegetation
[] Agricultural Land [] Flood Plain/Flooding [] Schools/Universities [x] Water Quality
[x] Air Quality [x] Forest Land/Fire Hazard [] Septic Systems [] Water Supply/Groundwater
[x] Archeological/Historical [x] Geologic/Seismic [] Sewer Capacity [x] Wetland/Riparian
[x] Biological Resources [] Minerals [x] Soil Erosion/Compaction/Grading [x] Growth Inducement
[x] Coastal Zone [x] Noise [] Solid Waste [] Land Use
[] Drainage/Absorption [x] Population/Housing Balance [x] Toxic/Hazardous [x] Cumulative Effects
[x] Economic/Jobs [x] Public Services/Facilities [x] Traffic/Circulation [] Other:

Present Land Use/Zoning/General Plan Designation:

As a programmatic document, projects may occur in any zoning designation depending on local government ordinances.

Project Description: (please use a separate page if necessary)
See attached Notice of Availability.

Note: The State Clearinghouse will assign identification numbers for all new projects. If a SCH number already exists for a project (e.g. Notice of Preparation or previous draft document) please fill in.

Reviewing Agencies Checklist

Lead Agencies may recommend State Clearinghouse distribution by marking agencies below with an "X". If you have already sent your document to the agency please denote that with an "S".

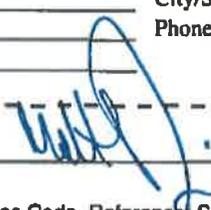
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Air Resources Board | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Office of Historic Preservation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boating & Waterways, Department of | <input type="checkbox"/> Office of Public School Construction |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> California Emergency Management Agency | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation, Department of |
| <input type="checkbox"/> California Highway Patrol | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pesticide Regulation, Department of |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caltrans District # _____ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public Utilities Commission |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caltrans Division of Aeronautics | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regional WQCB #All _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Caltrans Planning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resources Agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Central Valley Flood Protection Board | <input type="checkbox"/> Resources Recycling and Recovery, Department of |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coachella Valley Mtns. Conservancy | <input type="checkbox"/> S.F. Bay Conservation & Development Comm. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coastal Commission | <input type="checkbox"/> San Gabriel & Lower L.A. Rivers & Mtns. Conservancy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Colorado River Board | <input type="checkbox"/> San Joaquin River Conservancy |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conservation, Department of | <input type="checkbox"/> Santa Monica Mtns. Conservancy |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Corrections, Department of | <input type="checkbox"/> State Lands Commission |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Delta Protection Commission | <input type="checkbox"/> SWRCB: Clean Water Grants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education, Department of | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SWRCB: Water Quality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy Commission | <input type="checkbox"/> SWRCB: Water Rights |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fish & Game Region #All _____ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tahoe Regional Planning Agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food & Agriculture, Department of | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Toxic Substances Control, Department of |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forestry and Fire Protection, Department of | <input type="checkbox"/> Water Resources, Department of |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Services, Department of | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>Sierra Nevada Conservancy</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health Services, Department of | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>Tahoe Conservancy</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing & Community Development | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Native American Heritage Commission | |

Local Public Review Period (to be filled in by lead agency)

Starting Date April 1, 2016 Ending Date May 31, 2016

Lead Agency (Complete if applicable):

Consulting Firm: _____	Applicant: _____
Address: _____	Address: _____
City/State/Zip: _____	City/State/Zip: _____
Contact: _____	Phone: _____
Phone: _____	

Signature of Lead Agency Representative:  **Date:** 3/29/16

Authority cited: Section 21083, Public Resources Code. Reference: Section 21161, Public Resources Code.