



**PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT  
OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE**

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**NOTICE OF PREPARATION (NOP) OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT  
REPORT FOR THE CITY OF CHICO VEGETATIVE FUELS MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**PROJECT TITLE:** City of Chico Vegetative Fuels Management Plan

**SUMMARY:** The City of Chico (“City”) is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the City of Chico Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (“VFMP”) for City-owned parcels. The City is requesting comments on the scope and content of the EIR. A description of the VFMP and its location, together with a summary of the probable environmental effects that will be addressed in the EIR, are included herein. The City is the lead agency undertaking preparation of a Draft EIR for the VFMP. City Staff and contractors prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) and will hold a scoping meeting to obtain public input regarding the scope and content of the environmental analysis, including the significant environmental issues, the proposed range of alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be included in the EIR. Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §15063(a), the City **has not** prepared an Initial Study (IS) prior to development of the EIR. The analysis and review of effects that are typically done within an IS will be done within the EIR.

**PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT PERIOD:** The City invites comments on the scope and content of the EIR in response to this NOP. The City prefers that comments be submitted via email at: linda.herman@chicoca.gov. Comments may also be submitted via mail to the following address:

City of Chico Public Works Department-Park Division  
Attn: VFMP – Scoping Comments  
P.O. Box 3420  
Chico CA 95927

Please reference the Vegetative Fuels Management Plan (VFMP) in all correspondence.

Pursuant to State law, comments will be accepted for 30 days after publication of this notice. **Responses to the NOP must be received via the above email or mailing address by 5:00 p.m. on October 9, 2020.** Comments will also be received at the EIR Scoping Meetings to be held as noticed below.

Commenters should focus comments on potential impacts of the VFMP on the physical environment. Commenters are encouraged to identify mitigation measures that could minimize potential adverse effects resulting from the VFMP and to identify reasonable alternatives to the VFMP.

**EIR PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING:** The City of Chico’s Natural Resource Committee of the Bidwell Park and Playgrounds Commission will conduct a public scoping meeting on the EIR for the Vegetative Fuels Management Plan on September 16, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. In accordance with the Governor’s Executive Order N-29-20, the meeting will be held entirely virtually via WebEx. For agenda, WebEx login information, and other details, see <https://chico.ca.us/post/2020-agendas> and choose the “Committee” tab.

The purpose of the public scoping meeting is to describe the proposed project and the environmental review process, and to receive verbal input. The City will consider all comments, written and oral, in determining the final scope of the evaluation to be included in the EIR.

The meeting facilities will be accessible to persons with disabilities. If special translation or signing services or other special accommodations are needed, please contact the Park Division Office at (530) 896-7800 at least 72 hours before the meeting.

**PURPOSE OF THE NOTICE OF PREPARATION (NOP):** Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines §15082(a), upon deciding to prepare an EIR, the City as lead agency must issue a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to inform the Governor's Office of Planning and Research trustee and responsible agencies, and relevant federal agencies that an EIR will be prepared. This notice is being sent to responsible or trustee agencies and other interested parties. Responsible and trustee agencies are those public agencies, besides the City of Chico, that have a role in considering approval and/or carrying out the project.

The purpose of the NOP is to provide information describing the project and its potential environmental effects to affected agencies and the public, so that they may comment on the scope and content of the information to be included in the EIR. CEQA Guideline §15082(b) states: "... [E]ach responsible and trustee agency and the Office of Planning and Research shall provide the lead agency with specific detail about the scope and content of the environmental information related to the responsible or trustee agency's area of statutory responsibility that must be included in the draft EIR. The response at a minimum shall identify: (A) The significant environmental issues and reasonable alternatives and mitigation measures that the responsible or trustee agency, or the Office of Planning and Research, will need to have explored in the Draft EIR; and (B) Whether the agency will be a responsible agency or trustee agency for the project." The City encourages responsible and trustee agencies and the Office of Planning and Research to provide this information to the City, so that the City can ensure that the Draft EIR meets the needs of those agencies.

Once the Draft EIR is completed, notice will be given, and the Draft EIR will be made available for review. Copies will be sent to all responsible and trustee agencies, to persons or entities who comment on this NOP, and to any person or entity that requests a copy. The Draft EIR will also be available for review at the City of Chico Park Division Office at 965 Fir Street, Chico, CA. Due to COVID-19, please call the office at 530-896-7800 to make an appointment and masks will be required to enter into City offices.

Following the close of the public review period for the DEIR, the City will prepare a final EIR, incorporating and responding to all comments received during the public comment period, for consideration by the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission and the Chico City Council, at a date for which notice shall be provided. As required by CEQA (§21092.5), the final EIR, including written responses to the comments submitted by public agencies, will be provided to commenting agencies at least 10 days prior to certification.

**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 **Figure 1** (attached), 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, the Teichert Ponds, the Airport Open Space, Bidwell Ranch, Foothill Preserve, various South Chico preserved properties, and the greenways along Little Chico Creek, Bidwell Ave., Comanche Creek, Dead Horse Slough, and Butte Creek Diversion Channel. The VFMP does not discuss 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, such as the 2018 Camp Fire. Implementation of the VFMP would involve thinning, pruning, grazing, prescribed burning, removal, 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.

The City has identified the following primary goals to guide preparation of the Plan and its implementation:

- Reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire on City-owned land;
- Reduce the likely impacts of wildfire to recreational resources and natural resources within City-owned parks and greenways;
- Improve the resilience of the wilder parts of the City parks system, such as Upper Bidwell Park, including by mitigating the unhealthy effects of long-term fire exclusion and by planning to safely reintroduce more regular prescribed fire;
- Reduce the likelihood of wildfires spreading from City-owned wildlands into neighborhoods and business districts and endangering lives and property;
- Reduce the likelihood of ignitions and extreme fire behavior to enhance public and firefighter safety;
- Implement practices to avoid or minimize impacts to natural resources;
- Maintain an active role in regional efforts to reduce wildfire hazard in Butte County.

The goals, objectives, and recommendations identified in the VFMP are based on a combination of evaluating existing field conditions and current vegetation and fire risk conditions at City parcels; analyzing spatial datasets of environmental and wildfire risk factors in a Geographic Information System (GIS); conducting GIS-based analysis and modeling to identify areas that may be subject to extreme fire behavior; identifying locations within the VFMP area that may present increased ignition potential or otherwise contribute to increase fire hazard; attending to and fulfilling the objectives of the 2008 Bidwell Park Master Management Plan (BPMMP), and receiving feedback and guidance from many stakeholders through various meetings, site visits, and written comments.

The VFMP describes various vegetation management techniques that may be employed depending on site conditions, including hand labor, mechanical processes (e.g., mowing), herbicide use, and grazing. Appropriate vegetation management techniques to be employed at a specific site would be identified by City of Chico Public Works Department (Parks Division) personnel during annual workplan development. These 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 best management practices (BMPs) to be implemented during vegetation management activities, and sets standards for desired conditions (e.g., acceptable vegetation density and composition) in different vegetation types. Finally, the VFMP also identifies and describes in detail a handful of priority projects at specific locations. These priority projects serve as examples of the kinds of vegetation management activities the City contemplates in the future.

The VFMP does not require the City to implement any certain vegetation management project or technique, nor does the City have sufficient resources to implement every possible project every year. However, the VFMP spells out the conditions and circumstances under which a given vegetation management technique may be used. In some cases, once the VFMP's EIR is certified, some vegetation management practices in some parklands may be considered maintenance actions (as opposed to discretionary projects). Other actions will still need supplementary environmental review that will tier off the EIR in the future. The practical effect of the VFMP should be to streamline City vegetation management activities for the next ten or more years.

The revised Draft VFMP is available for public review at the following website:  
<https://www.bcrnd.org/city-of-chico-vegetative-fuels-management-plan-3979084>

**ANTICIPATED ENTITLEMENTS AND APPROVALS:** Implementation of the VFMP may include approvals from the following agencies:

- Chico City Council
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- USACE
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
- California Department of Water Resources (DWR)
- Butte County Air Quality Management District (BCAQMD)
- CAL FIRE/CFD
- Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
- California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

**PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS AND PROPOSED SCOPE OF THE EIR:** The EIR will analyze and disclose the direct and reasonably foreseeable indirect potentially significant environmental impacts of implementation of the VFMP (CEQA Guidelines §15126.2, §15130). Where significant impacts are identified, the EIR will describe potentially feasible mitigation measures that could minimize significant adverse impacts (CEQA Guidelines §15126.4).

Topics to be analyzed in the EIR include but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Historic Resources (including Tribal Cultural Resources)
- Energy
- Geology and Soils (including Geological and Seismic Hazards)
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Global Climate Change
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise and Vibration
- Population and Housing (including Growth Inducement)
- Public Services (including Police Services, Fire Protection Services, Parks and Schools)
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire
- Cumulative Impacts

Some topics will receive greater analysis than others because some resource areas are expected to experience greater potential impacts than others from implementation of the VFMP. Potential issues and impacts to the existing environment are summarized below. These topics will be further evaluated in the Draft EIR.

**Aesthetics** – Vegetation management activities will impact trees in the VFMP area and will be visible along public roads, highways and parks, and open space. In some cases, vegetation management activities will be visible from private properties that abut parks and open space. The activities proposed under the VFMP would not create a new source of substantial light or glare. The Draft EIR will evaluate whether the VFMP would adversely affect the existing visual character or quality of the Plan area and its surroundings.

**Air Quality** – Vehicle and equipment emissions generated by VFMP activities, as well as prescribed fires and burn piles, may impact air quality. The Draft EIR will describe the potential short- and long-term impacts of the VFMP on local and regional air quality based on methodologies stipulated by the

Butte County Air Quality Management District (BCAQMD) and will include any required mitigation measures to address air pollutant emissions generated by the VFMP.

**Biological Resources** – The VFMP area includes plant and animal species that are identified as candidate, sensitive or special status species (i.e. “protected species”) by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and/or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, there are riparian habitats and sensitive natural communities within the VFMP area. The Draft EIR will examine the potential for substantial adverse effects on biological resources.

**Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources** – The analysis in the Draft EIR will assess the potential for ground disturbing activities associated with the VFMP to damage or destroy recorded or unrecorded archaeological sites and paleontological resources and will include the results of consultation with Native American representatives. The Draft EIR will also address potential effects on tribal cultural resources.

**Noise** – Certain vegetation management methods proposed under the VFMP (such as the use of mechanical equipment to remove vegetation) could result in short-term generation of noise above ambient levels while those activities are taking place. The Draft EIR will consider whether the implementation of vegetation management activities will: exceed established standards in the City’s General Plan and noise ordinance, and other applicable standards; have the potential to expose people to excessive ground borne vibrations and noise levels; and result in a substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels in the VFMP area.

**Cumulative Impacts** – The Draft EIR will evaluate cumulative impacts of the VFMP, including the effects of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects in the vicinity (CEQA Guidelines §15130). The Draft EIR will also identify and examine a range of reasonable alternatives to the VFMP, including, but not limited to, a No Project Alternative (Guidelines §15126.6).

Date: 9/9/20

Name: Linda Herman

Signature: *Linda Herman*

Title: City of Chico Park & Natural Resources Manager

Attachment: Map



# Lands Discussed in City of Chico Vegetative Fuels Management Plan

