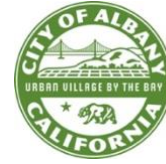


FAQ's

ALBANY HILL FOREST MANAGEMENT AND HABITAT RESTORATION PLAN



TIMELINE

1. WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR THIS PROJECT?

We anticipate that this will be a multi-year phased project. We are currently in the very early stages of concept design development after an extensive assessment and study phase. We are targeting the development of a final plan for late 2024.

2. CONCERN ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE PROJECT—WHAT ABOUT TREES THAT NEED IMMEDIATE ATTENTION?

The City is monitoring the most precarious trees in the project area, and there is a clear mandate for the consultant team to address the urgent safety issues first. If removals are needed prior to initiation of the first phase of the project, the City will attend to those removals on a case-by-case basis.

3. PLEASE MAKE SURE TO CONSIDER PUBLIC SAFETY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POTENTIAL TREEFALL ON TAFT AND JACKSON ST RESIDENCES IN ADDITION TO FIRE SAFETY. THANK YOU!

Comment noted. Also see answer to #2 above.

FUNDING

4. HOW IS THE CITY PAYING FOR THIS PROJECT?

The City has a grant from the [Coastal Conservancy's Wildfire Resilience Program](#), plus internal funding, to pay for consultant support in developing the Forest Management and Habitat Restoration Plan. Once a plan is created, we will need additional funding to pay for implementation of the plan. We are researching grants to help in this next phase.

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BIRD HABITAT

5. CONCERNS/QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT NEGATIVELY AFFECTING BIRD HABITAT, INCLUDING NECTAR FROM EUCALYPTUS FLOWERS IN THE WINTER, NESTING IN HOLES AND BARK OF EUCALYPTUS, AND FORAGING, HUNTING, ROOSTING, AND COVER IN THE EUCALYPTUS AND UNDERSTORY.

The project's restoration plantings will include species that flower in the winter, providing alternative nectar sources for hummingbirds and other pollinators. Some snags may be retained outside of fall hazard areas to maintain habitat for crevice and cavity nesting species. Patches of understory vegetation may also be retained, within fire safety tolerances, to continue providing habitat for species that rely on shrubs for cover.

6. WHAT WILL BE THE PROTOCOLS FOR NEST CLEARANCE IF THE EUCALYPTUS REMOVAL HAPPENS DURING THE NESTING SEASON?

If possible, tree and vegetation removal activities should be conducted between September 1 and January 31, outside of the nesting season.

If tree and vegetation removal begins during the nesting season (February 1 – August 31), pre-construction surveys for nesting birds will be conducted by a qualified biologist no more than one week prior to the start of project work. The surveys will cover the project area and adjacent habitats up to 300 feet from the project boundary if possible. The surveys will entail a variety of techniques, such as systematically searching nesting substrates, watching adult birds for parental behavior (e.g., carrying nest material or food), incidental flushing of an adult from a concealed nest, and auditory detection of begging calls from nestlings. If no active nests are found within the survey area, no further action is necessary.

If active nests, i.e. nests with eggs or young present, are found within the survey area, non-disturbance buffers will be established at a distance sufficient to minimize disturbance based on the nest location, topography, cover, the nesting pair's tolerance to disturbance and the type/duration of potential disturbance. No work will occur within the non-disturbance buffers until the young have fledged as determined by a qualified biologist. If buffers are established and it is determined that project activities are resulting in nest disturbance, work in the nearby vicinity of the nest will cease immediately.

7. ARE THERE OWLS ON THE HILL? WHERE ARE THEY?

Neighbors attending the meeting reported to have seen 3 on site, on west side of hill behind towers, and on the North side along Jackson. The project intends to leave some dead snags on site for habitat where they don't pose a fire or safety hazard.

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8. ALBANY BULB IS DESIGNATED QUAIL HABITAT...CAN THIS HAPPEN AT ALBANY HILL?

The number of dogs and cats and other ground predators on the Hill would make establishing quail habitat a challenge. The Bulb is designated as patch habitat in the California Quail Connectivity Modeling for the California Bay Area Linkage Network in [BIOS](#). Patch habitat is an area of suitable habitat large enough to support successful reproduction by a pair of individuals (perhaps more if home ranges overlap greatly), but smaller than a potential core area. Patches are useful to the species if the patches are linked via dispersal to other patches and core areas. Since both the Bulb and Albany Hill are not linked to each other or to other patches or cores of quail habitat, establishing breeding populations of quail on either site would be difficult.

MONARCHS

9. WILL MONARCHS APPRECIATE NECTAR PLANTS IN LIEU OF EUCALYPTUS?

Monarchs currently fatten up on the January bloom/nectar from the Eucalyptus. They are opportunistic feeders, so if other (native) nectar sources are available, it is anticipated they would happily use them. Also, this project only involves the Eucalyptus on City managed property. There will still be Eucalyptus down slope from the project area.

10. WHAT OTHER NATIVE TREES DO MONARCHS USE THAT WE CAN PLANT ON THE HILL?

Trees that would have been found on Albany Hill historically are not good Monarch habitat providers. See the comment card answer below – the team is considering various approaches to the long-term need to support Monarch populations, and how best to plan for that strategically.

11. ARE MONTEREY PINES WELL SUITED FOR TOP OF HILL MONARCH HABITAT?

Monterey pines would likely grow well on Albany Hill as there are established stands in sandstone substrates in the Berkeley and Oakland Hills. However, there are some reasons that Monterey pines might not be a good choice for Albany Hill: their native range consists of very limited areas located in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo Counties; Monterey Pines are extremely flammable and create large amounts of duff that also create a fire hazard. Using them on a large scale isn't advisable, but because there are no suitable native tree substitutes, planting Monterey pines or other non-local native trees may be explored further during the planning phases of the project as structural alternatives to keeping Eucalyptus on the ridge.

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OAKS

12. HOW FAST WILL OAKS GROW AFTER TREES ARE REMOVED? AND HOW BIG WILL THEY GET?

Growth rates are determined by both the natural rate and form of the species in question, as well as available light, water, and nutrients. We anticipate that the removal of the Eucalyptus will increase water and sunlight availability on the Hill. It will still take many years for new and young trees to reach their full stature. The maximum size is unknown but they would likely reach 20-30 feet tall at maturity.

13. THERE WERE NO OAKS ON ALBANY HILL PRE-EUCALYPTUS, EXCEPT THE NORTH, BY THE CREEK. WHY DO YOU THINK OAKS WILL GROW ON TOP WHEN THE EUCALYPTUS ARE GONE. I DON'T UNDERSTAND. THANKS.

During the restoration planning process, suitable locations for oak trees and oak woodland will be identified based on an analysis of existing vegetation and other conditions. The grasslands on Albany Hill were likely maintained by land management activities such as burning, so oak trees may actually be able to grow and survive in more places than only the northern most slopes. Young oaks are present in the understory of Eucalyptus on site, which suggests that oaks will grow well in these locations. Other areas of Albany Hill may not be suitable for oaks and the target plant communities in this area will be grassland or shrubland.

GRASSLANDS/COASTAL PRAIRIE

14. WHAT VISION DO YOU HAVE FOR GRASSLAND RESTORATION AND HOW DO YOU INTEND TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN NATIVE NONINVASIVE MEADOWS/GRASSLANDS?

The goal for grassland restoration on Albany Hill will be a matrix of non-native annual grasses with stands of native grassland species scattered throughout. This is the pattern we see in native grasslands on sandstone throughout the East Bay. The grassland restoration methodology will focus on maintaining and enhancing existing stands of native grassland species, as well as establishing new stands of native grassland species in areas where conditions will support them. Existing stands will be enhanced and maintained through weed control including timed mowing, mulching, tarping, hand weeding, and other methods, which will reduce the competitive pressure from non-natives. Native plants will be propagated via seed or vegetative propagule collection from Albany Hill, growing out of native plants into containers, and out planting, or in some cases direct seeding or planting of vegetative propagules. Plantings will be established and maintained through weed control. Weed control will be conducted by volunteers as well as Urban Tilth.

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15. I WANT TO SEE MORE NATIVE GRASSLANDS/COASTAL PRAIRIE. THIS HABITAT IS DISAPPEARING AND PROVIDES HABITAT AND FOOD FOR MANY SPECIES OF WILDLIFE.

A goal of the project is to preserve and enhance existing grasslands including grassland stands that occur in the understory of Eucalyptus forest. As Eucalyptus trees are removed in areas with a grassy understory, we anticipate that the herbaceous understory will be converted to grassland. Management activities maintaining these areas as grassland and enhancing native herbaceous species.

16. HOW DOES THE MOWING OF GRASSES WORK TO FAVOR NATIVE PLANTS? WHAT WOULD THE MOWING SCHEDULES BE?

Appropriately timed mowing can reduce the cover of non-native annual grasses and favor the establishment of perennial native species. The term "mowing" includes selective vegetation trimming using a string trimmer or brush cutter, in which the operator can selectively avoid trimming native species. Annual grass species generally germinate in winter through early spring and flower in spring through late spring. Native perennial grassland species often have a later phenology than annual grass species and flower later in the spring and summer. Mowing in the spring when annual grasses are still green can reduce competition from annual grasses and provide space for perennial native species to grow and establish. Mowing while the annual grasses are green can also prevent seed set, thus reducing the annual grass seed bank in the soil. The correct timing of mowing depends on the phenology of the vegetation which can vary year to year depending on the rainfall and temperatures received. The mowing schedule will not be set in advance and mowing will be implemented as part of an adaptive management process on Albany Hill. Mowing will occur in specific locations if it is determined that mowing would be an effective strategy for grassland enhancement and maintenance based on the current conditions.

POISON OAK

17. IS THERE THE POTENTIAL FOR BETTER POISON OAK CONTROL ON THE HILL?

Along trails, the City of Albany tries to keep poison oak cut back for public access. Although poison oak is a nuisance to humans, it is a desirable species on Albany Hill for several reasons. Poison oak is a native species that provides habitat for wildlife species. Animals are not sensitive to poison oak so they use the plants for habitat; the tangled leaves and stems provide good cover for birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and small mammals. Several insect species, including a variety of butterflies and moths, feed on the leaves, as do deer and squirrels. Their flowers also serve as a food source for insects. The berries are an important food source for a variety of bird species since the berries are present in late fall and into winter. Poison oak is a native species and can outcompete invasive weeds so is valuable for replacing invasive weed cover with native cover.

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MAPPING AND SPACING OF VEGETATION

18. QUESTION ABOUT MAPPING EXISTING NATIVE TREES AND NEW PLANTINGS, ALONG WITH WHAT WOULD BE THE SPACING OF NEW PLANTS

We would likely be addressing the native plants already on site by zone, and treatment or protection required in those areas, and by phase. On all plans, new plantings would include spacing and location information. As we progress on the design phase, we will be sharing plans and drawings with the public for comment.

TOYONS

19. THE EUCALYPTUS CREATED CONSIDERABLE FOG DRIP (SOME ESTIMATES ARE UP TO 10 INCHES A YEAR) WHICH HELPED THE TOYON BECOME ESTABLISHED AND THRIVE. WITHOUT THIS ADDED MOISTURE WILL THE TOYONS SURVIVE?

The Eucalyptus also uptake significant volumes of water, and with their removal, that portion of the water budget will ostensibly be available for other species. Additionally, with Eucalyptus gone, fog will still blanket the hill, and the Toyon will be able to generate their own drip effect. Toyon have survived and thrived both as Eucalyptus understory and as native shrubs after Eucalyptus removal in other locations. While they are happier with more water than many chaparral shrubs, they are still an [Extremely Low to Very Low water rated species](#) (calscape.org). The solar radiation changes and new exposure to winds may prevent further recruitment. The team is continuing to evaluate what species and target habitat types could or should be.

VOLUNTEER HELP

20. WILL THERE BE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING ORGANIZATIONS, TO HELP WITH THE RESTORATION PLANTINGS?

Yes, we will involve the public, including organizations, in community planting events.

TURKEYS AND GENERAL WILDLIFE QUESTIONS

21. TURKEYS ARE HAVING A STRONG INFLUENCE ON THE PLANTS, INSECTS AND AMPHIBIANS – WE USED TO SEE MORE AND THEY ARE ALL GONE.

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. The consultant team will look into the issue and find out what some potential options are for addressing the impacts.

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22. WHAT ANIMALS OR SPECIES ARE WE HOPING TO ATTRACT TO THE HILL?

We are not targeting specific species (other than preserving the amenities needed by the Monarchs) but the restoration of now-rare coastal prairie grasslands and native oak woodland habitat will provide resources for a large number of native species.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION/REUSE OF EUCALYPTUS

23. HOW ARE WE FACTORING CARBON SEQUESTRATION INTO OUR DESIGN PLANS?

The team has carbon sequestration on the list of criteria to evaluate our options. Chipping and reusing the biomass of the removed Eucalyptus on site is part of the conversation. The City of Albany has already utilized a mobile mill via Bay Area Redwood to recycle recently removed Eucalyptus into boards used for erosion control and other construction uses on the hill.

24. WHAT ARE THE BENCHES, STEPS, AND BARRICADES AT THE TAFT TURNAROUND MADE OF?

They are made from eucalyptus trees cut down for the trails and access improvement project 4 years ago.

SLOPE STABILITY/EROSION CONTROL

25. WILL THE HILL BE MORE UNSTABLE AFTER EUC REMOVAL?

Eucalyptus do not stabilize the hillside – their roots penetrate and crack the sandstone in their quest for water. Many of the stumps will remain in place, but the team is looking at native plants (perennial native bunchgrasses), reuse of eucalyptus logs, other bioengineering stabilization techniques.

EUCALYPTUS RE-SPROUTING

26. THE EUCALYPTUS TREES CAN AND WILL SURVIVE AS EVIDENCED BY THE EPICORMIC SPROUTING AND THE REGENERATION OF TREES KILLED BY THE “BIG FREEZE” OF 1972. DESPITE AN INTENSIVE “SUCKER-BASHING” PROGRAM, FOR SOME YEARS FOLLOWING THE FREEZE (TO STOP RESPROUTING), THE EUCALYPTUS DID COME BACK.

It is the professional and expert opinion of the environmental scientists (Ewing 2021), plant pathologists (Garbelotto 2021), and the multiple arborists (McNeil Arboriculture Consultants 2022, SBCA Tree Consulting 2021) who have examined these and other [Eucalyptus stands around the Bay Area](#), that the trees are in decline and are struggling to survive which leaves them open to disease, limb drop, and overall failure. Epicormic sprouting is not evidence that these trees are healthy or compatible with continued dominance of the Hill. Even if the trees

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do resprout, it's not an indication of continued health. Epicormic sprouting is a stress response, and the presence of epicormic buds under the bark of the Tasmanian Blue Gums are likely an adaptation to the frequent fires in their native habitat.

27. HOW DO YOU INTEND TO PREVENT EUCALYPTUS RE-SPROUTING?

The City is practicing Integrated Pest Management guidelines and will not be using pesticides. Covering the cut stumps with tarps and removing any stump sprouts over the course of a few years will eventually kill the stump. Many of the stumps that have been left from previous removals haven't resprouted. We will largely be deploying mechanical means of suppression.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

28. *The Fire Department has considered prescribed burns and is studying if and how it could be done safely in the future as a management tool. With the fire loads on the hill right now, it isn't a prudent technique at the moment, but that may change over time.*

PRIVATE LANDOWNERS/PARCEL LINES/EASEMENTS

29. WILL THE CONDO ASSOCIATION AND PRIVATE OWNERS DO SIMILAR WORK ON THE HILL TO REMOVE EUCS?

Hopefully the City project will serve as a template and inspire other landowners to address the issues on their parcels. The City project may make it easier to apply for grants to address the private parcels.

30. IS GOLDEN GATE HILL DEVELOPMENT CO. WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH THIS PROCESS?
[11-acre property owner]

The City expects the owners of the property to be engaged, but at this stage, it would be premature to ask the owners to make a commitment to implementing actions on private property. Please note that this is a plan for the publicly owned portion of the property, and not establishing regulations on private property.

31. WHY DOES THE PROJECT MAP SHOW DEVELOPMENT PARCEL LINES [BETWEEN JACKSON AND TAFT] AND AN EASEMENT [ON THE NW SIDE]? ARE THESE ARTIFACTS THAT HAVEN'T BEEN CLEARED UP?

The area between Jackson and Taft was subdivided into a number of parcels decades ago before the City acquired the property. It's common for one contiguous open space to be a

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series of parcels. Merging the parcels together could be done but would be a low priority for City staff time and expense.

Bayside Commons at 535 Pierce St. has title to the parcel underlying the easement on the NW side of the hill. Staff does not have a title report on the details, but believes it is a grant of an easement from Bayside Commons to the City for access.

32. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE LAND UNDER THE FORMER CROSS? WILL IT BECOME PART OF THE PARK?

The parcel where the cross used to stand has been City parkland since the early 1970's. The easement held by the Lions Club on the parcel has been terminated and currently no entity other than the City has claims to the parcel or to anything on it.

ACCESS TO SUMMIT

33. PROVIDE BETTER ACCESS TO THE SUMMIT BY EXTENDING SIDEWALKS

We have noted the desire for more park-like amenities at the summit. There are sidewalks along Taft to the entrance to the park. The City is working on clearing soil and rocks from the sidewalk on the west side of the street and installing retaining walls. We plan to use lumber milled from felled eucalyptus for this project. (See also answer to #20 above.)

To access the top of the hill from the north, walkers can come up the trail through the oak woodland, which starts at the eastern base of the hill and is accessible by walking north on the trail that starts at the far N end of Madison St.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS/CONCERNS OUTSIDE OF THE PROJECT SCOPE

34. THERE ARE A LOT OF BRANCHES FROM OAKS ON THE GROUND IN THE OAK WOODLAND. WHAT IS GOING ON THERE? IS THAT A FIRE HAZARD?

A few oaks fell in last year's storms, blocking the trail, and the City had an arborist cut up the fallen trees and buck the trunks and branches into smaller pieces. Also, at the base of the east slope of the hill we thinned smaller oaks to allow more light and room for stronger oaks to grow. We also cut up branches that had broken from trees in last year's storm. We used this material to block off bike ramps that had been gouged into the hillside. The material also prevents erosion and provides wildlife habitat.

The oak woodland has a lower overall fire hazard compared to the areas with eucalyptus, and the larger logs on the ground there have a low fire hazard rating because they take longer to burn. The smaller branches present a slightly higher fire hazard and we will revisit the area to cut them into smaller pieces and scatter.

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35. PROVIDE BETTER ACCESS TO THE HILL BY BUILDING A BRIDGE OVER CERRITO CREEK

The City of El Cerrito may be better suited to take the lead on planning, designing, and implementing a bridge project. A few years ago the City, with the help of consultants, looked at a crossing of Cerrito Creek in the vicinity of Belmont Ave. The City planned to use bond measure funds and a grant for the project. The City dropped the project when it realized that, except for a portion of the southern abutment, the bridge would be in the jurisdiction of El Cerrito and at that time there wasn't significant involvement from the City of El Cerrito in the project. If the City of Albany participated in a bridge project in the future, it would likely need grant funding.

36. PLEASE PROVIDE A RESTROOM ON THE HILL

There isn't the required sewer and water infrastructure on the open space areas of Albany Hill to support a restroom.

37. STRONG OPPOSITION TO INSTALLING A BATHROOM ON ALBANY HILL. THE HILL SHOULD BE TREATED AS WILD OPEN SPACE, NOT AS A PARK WITH FACILITIES. THERE ARE MANY PARKS ALREADY WITH FACILITIES. ADDING A BATHROOM ON ALBANY HILL WOULD COMPLETELY CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF THE HILL AND WOULD PROBABLY ATTRACT VANDALISM AND OTHER ISSUES, SUCH AS THOSE WHICH HAVE ALREADY PARTIALLY OR COMPLETELY CLOSED THE BATHROOM IN VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK.

Comment noted. Also see answer to #4 above.

38. ANY CHANGES TO THE TRAIL MAINTENANCE FROM RIDGETOP TO GATEVIEW AVE. IN A SW/DOWNHILL PATH? IT'S COMPLETELY RUTTED, SO AFFECTED BY RUNOFF.

City staff will look into ways to improve the fire road on city property on the crest of the hill, but keep in mind that fire roads on the south end of the hill are on private property.

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