

The East Bay Vegetation Management Consortium: A Subregional Approach to Resource Management and Planning¹

Tony Acosta²

Formed in response to the October 20, 1991, Oakland/Berkeley hills firestorm, the East Bay Vegetation Management Consortium (EBVMC) is a voluntary association of public agencies concerned with vegetation management and planning related to fire hazard reduction in the Oakland/Berkeley hills. To date, a total of nine agencies are participating in the EBVMC, including local cities, park districts, public utilities, and educational and research facilities. Each agency owns or is responsible for significant open-space lands in the East Bay hills. The EBVMC is preparing a Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) oriented toward fire hazard reduction; this planning effort is funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, with FEMA and EBVMC agencies splitting the \$330,000 total project cost. The VMP project was initiated in August 1993 and is projected to be completed by September 1994. The VMP has been developed with substantial public input by a team led by Amphion Environmental, Inc., an Oakland-based planning firm. The University of California, Berkeley, is also contracted

to the EBVMC to develop a geographic information system (GIS) for the VMP. A Technical Advisory Committee and Citizen's Advisory Committee have been formed to provide review and comment on the VMP as it is developed. Several series of public workshops will also be presented to provide the general public with the opportunity to learn and comment about the VMP. The basic goal of the VMP is to reduce the risk and potential loss from future wildfires in the East Bay hills. This basic goal will be achieved by improving communication and coordination of work planning and activities between local agencies, establishing a resource-based approach to vegetation management (as opposed to a jurisdictional approach), and developing and implementing a consistent set of standards for vegetation management activities (ranging from land management prescriptions to residential parcel inspection criteria). Ultimate success for the EBVMC will depend on public support and political will to change traditional jurisdictional approaches to resource management and program funding.

¹An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the Biswell Symposium: Fire Issues and Solutions in Urban Interface and Wildland Ecosystems, February 15-17, 1994, Walnut Creek, California.

²Parks Service Manager, Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation, 1520 Lakeside Dr., Oakland, CA 94612.