



## **Overview: Environmental Review of MMWD's Draft Wildfire Protection and Habitat Improvement Plan: Safeguarding Our Communities and Environment**

The Marin Municipal Water District invites you to participate in the environmental review process for the *Draft MMWD Wildfire Protection and Habitat Improvement Plan: Safeguarding Our Communities and Environment*. Formerly known as the 2012 Vegetation Management Plan, MMWD renamed the plan with the launch of the environmental review process to avoid confusion with the district's 1995 Vegetation Management Plan. The new name also more accurately reflects the plan's purpose. This new plan addresses fire hazard reduction and biodiversity protection on the 22,000 acres of watershed land managed by MMWD with drinking water protection as the number one priority.

MMWD has contracted Panorama Environmental, Inc. to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) for the Draft WPHIP. The Draft EIR will present an evaluation of the actions included in the Draft WPHIP for potential harm to people and the environment. Continuing our commitment to openness and inclusion, MMWD seeks input from members of the community during the EIR process.

### **Background**

MMWD is responsible for 22,000 acres of Marin County's most scenic open spaces, including much of Mt. Tamalpais. MMWD actively manages these lands, which protect and filter our drinking water. We clear brush and remove dead trees inside a 1,100-acre fuelbreak system to protect our communities, water supply and ecosystems from potentially catastrophic wildfire. We trim vegetation to keep more than 150 miles of roads and trails, as well as reservoir shorelines, tanks and pipelines accessible. We manage weeds and restore habitat to benefit rare and threatened species. We monitor rare plants and animals.

The Draft WPHIP will guide these activities, taking up where the 1995 Vegetation Management Plan ends. Conditions on Mt. Tamalpais have changed, as has our understanding of what works and what doesn't, which is why it's time for a new plan. The Draft WPHIP identifies goals and objectives, defines management areas and describes actions. It also defines limitations and standards that are designed to protect people, water quality and the surrounding environment.

### **The Draft Wildfire Protection and Habitat Improvement Plan 2012**

Leonard Charles and Associates worked with MMWD to author the Draft 2012 WPHIP. The main goals are:

1. **To protect Marin's communities, water supply and natural resources from catastrophic wildfire.** More than 25,000 homes and 45,000 people live in the fire-prone neighborhoods bordering Mt. Tamalpais. These border areas have been given a fire hazard rating of "high" or "very high" from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.
2. **To preserve habitats, plants and animals into the future.** MMWD's watershed lands comprise less than 0.01 percent of the land area of California but are home to 15 percent of the state's plant species. In fact, Mt. Tamalpais is home to over 400 kinds of animals and 900 types of plants, including 7 found nowhere else in the world.
3. **To prepare for and adapt to future changes.** In the foreseeable future, forest disease, climate change and new weeds will pose new challenges. At the same time, advances in habitat restoration, weed control, and ecological science will offer MMWD new ways to protect our resources.

The Draft WPHIP describes 38 actions needed to achieve these goals. They include fuelbreak construction and maintenance, weed control, habitat restoration, vegetation mapping and monitoring. These actions address known threats including climate change, Sudden Oak Death, increased wildfire risk and accelerating weed spread. The Draft WPHIP also assesses the likely cost and effectiveness of the various actions.

### **Effective Weed Control is Key**

The Draft WPHIP places great emphasis on the need to improve weed control. French and Scotch broom, yellow starthistle, goat grass and a handful of other weeds are increasing wildfire risk and degrading habitat. We estimate 1,200 acres are already infected. Weed control is a necessary action. Without it, MMWD is unable to protect lives and property from fire, access water supply pipelines and tanks, and preserve rare species or restore degraded habitats. MMWD has invested millions of dollars and many thousands of hours trying to limit the harm caused by weeds. Yet the problem continues to grow. We estimate an area equal to 24 football fields is invaded each year by French broom alone.

Because MMWD does not have the financial resources to control all weeds everywhere, the Draft WPHIP divides Mt. Tamalpais into zones and sets weed control priorities within those zones. For example, in the Pine Mountain area where weeds are few but rare species many, the objective is to completely eliminate some weeds before they spread further and cause harm. In the Phoenix Lake area, where weeds are firmly established and habitat quality already degraded, the objective is only to maintain access to roads, trails, tanks and the shoreline and to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

### **Two Approaches to Weed Control in Draft WPHIP**

MMWD has experimented with many weed control techniques including grazing, mulching, tarping, pressurized water, hot foam, organic herbicides and conventional herbicides. But we rely mainly on repeat mowing, hand removal and prescribed burning. Conventional herbicides have not been used since 2005 due to public concerns about potential harm to water quality, people and the environment.

The Draft WPHIP reviews all of these weed control options and puts forth two distinct approaches for weed control going forward. Both approaches adhere to the principle of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which means using a combination of methods to effectively and economically control weeds while causing the least harm possible to people and the environment. Both approaches include mowing, hand removal, prescribed burning, tarping, mulching, flaming and organic herbicides. Approach 2 adds limited quantities of some conventional herbicides to the tool box while Approach 1 does not.

### **The EIR Process**

Panorama Environmental will prepare the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which will present an assessment of the potential impacts caused by taking either approach described in the Draft WPHIP. The Draft EIR will include:

- An assessment of the potential impacts of implementing various alternative approaches or of continuing the current program without changes;
- Analyses of impacts to water and air quality, plants and animals, human health, traffic, noise, scenic beauty and many other factors that contribute to our quality of life in Marin County; and
- A recommended alternative approach that best protects the water supply, Mt. Tamalpais and the community's in MMWD's service area.

### **Public Participation**

MMWD has welcomed input from the public throughout the development phase of the Draft WPHIP. Between April 2007 and December 2010, we hosted nine public workshops and presentations to provide information and receive suggestions, concerns and feedback. Leonard Charles and Associates produced seven background documents on key issues tied to wildfire protection and habitat improvement on Mt. Tamalpais. These reports are still available on our website for reference along with other useful studies, slide shows and reports.

Like you, MMWD is committed to protecting our drinking water, our communities and Mt. Tamalpais. We welcome your participation in this next step towards updating and improving our wildfire protection and habitat improvement program: environmental review of the plan. We hope you will read the plan, ask questions, visit the mountain and become an active participant as we analyze impacts and seek solutions. Our goal is to empower you to become effective participants in the process and in the future protection of our most precious resources. See the online WPHIP Calendar, which will be updated regularly, for a current schedule.