

University of California
San Francisco



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University Advancement and Planning

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July 23, 2009

Urban Forestry Council
Attn: Mei Ling Hui, Urban Forest Coordinator
11 Grove Street
San Francisco, California 94102

Dear Council Members,

Thank you for your invitation to speak with you about UCSF's proposed fire mitigation projects for the Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve.

As you can see from the attached letter to neighbors, UCSF has postponed the implementation of these projects and in the fall will conduct additional community meetings to solicit further public input. The feedback we receive from the community will help to shape how the projects proceed.

As such, I believe it would be more appropriate for us to attend one of your fall meetings to provide an update on how the project plans are evolving. I would appreciate it if you could be in contact with Barbara Bagot-López, Associate Director of Community Relations, at bblopez@cgr.ucsf.edu or 415-476-8318, to identify some possible fall dates.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara French', written over a horizontal line.

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July 9, 2009

Dear Neighbors,

On May 18, 2009, UCSF hosted a community meeting at St. John's Armenian Church to discuss proposals for two fire mitigation projects within UCSF's 61-acre Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve that were submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for pre-disaster mitigation funding. During the meeting, participants raised a number of issues regarding the grants and the potential impact of the mitigation work on the area. We subsequently received additional inquiries regarding these projects.

As a result of the substantial community interest in these proposed projects, UCSF has postponed its planned implementation and, in the fall, will conduct additional community meetings and site walks to solicit further public input. UCSF is committed to a thorough discussion with neighbors and will use this feedback to shape how the projects proceed.

To provide additional information about the proposed projects, I am attaching a set of Questions and Answers for your review. You may also review UCSF's grant applications to FEMA and other project information on the Internet at <http://campusplanning.ucsf.edu/physical/mountsutro.php>. If you do not have access to the internet we can, at your request, provide paper copies. To request paper copies, please contact Barbara Bagot-López at (415) 476-8318 or at bblopez@CGR.ucsf.edu.

As a reminder, the first proposed project, referred to as the UCSF Mount Sutro South Ridge Vegetation Management Project, is planned for an approximately eight-acre area of the Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve where a wildfire would be particularly threatening to student campus housing located in the Reserve and to private structures within a one-half mile radius of the project site.

The second proposed project, the UCSF Mount Sutro Edgewood Avenue Vegetation Management Project, is planned for an approximately six-acre area of the Reserve where wildfire poses a serious threat to campus buildings, including the Medical Center, and to a densely populated residential area on the east side of the campus.

In closing, I want to underscore UCSF's intention of working with the community to ensure we fully understand and address neighborhood concerns. If after reading the attached information you have additional questions or comments, please contact Ms. Bagot-López at the above email address or direct phone line.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara French', written in a cursive style.

Barbara J. French
Associate Vice Chancellor
University Relations



UCSF Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve:

Proposed Vegetation Management Projects for South Ridge and Edgewood Avenue Areas

1. What is UCSF proposing to do in the Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve?

UCSF proposes to use "Pre-Disaster Mitigation Funding" from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to significantly reduce the potential for a fast-moving, high intensity fire in two demonstration areas of the 61-acre Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve. The two demonstration areas are in the 8-acre South Ridge area where immediately adjacent wood framed university housing and private homes (e.g., Forest Knolls) are most vulnerable; and the 6-acre Edgewood Avenue area where campus buildings and additional private homes to the east (primarily downwind) of the campus are most vulnerable. The UCSF FEMA grant applications and information on the Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve can be found at <http://campusplanning.ucsf.edu/physical/mountsutroplan.php>.

2. Why is UCSF proposing these projects?

- To significantly reduce the potential for a fast-moving, high intensity fire in two demonstration areas of the 61-acre Open Space Reserve
- UCSF's 1996 UCSF Long Range Development Plan (LRDP), which serves as the university's master plan, included a proposal to "Maintain the Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve as permanent open space and investigate an appropriate maintenance and restoration program for trees and vegetation in the Reserve." The LRDP process was informed by four years of extensive community input.
- In 2001, UCSF published the "Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve Management Plan" (2001 Management Plan), a product of considerable community involvement over a two-year period. The Plan calls for a 2-acre forest thinning demonstration project in the South Ridge area.
- UCSF wants to take advantage of FEMA funding to do a larger demonstration project in the South Ridge area (8 acres rather than 2 acres). This would be more effective in reducing the potential for a damaging fire. The Edgewood Avenue area was targeted in the 2001 Management Plan initially for the removal of hazardous trees and forest thinning in the long-term.

3. When would the proposed projects be done?

- Due to public concerns, UCSF has decided to delay implementation of the proposed projects. UCSF is committed to a thorough discussion with the community and to using this feedback to help shape how the projects would proceed.
- Fall 2009—UCSF will begin holding additional community meetings and site walks of the proposed project areas to solicit further public input.
- 2009-2010—To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is preparing a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) to evaluate and disclose the potential environmental impacts of the two projects and project alternatives. The DEA will be available for public review.
- After community process—UCSF decides how to proceed based on community input.

4. What are the objectives of the projects?

- To substantially reduce the amount of highly combustible fuels to prevent a fast-moving, high-intensity fire that could spread to adjacent residential areas
- To improve the health and safety of the remaining trees
- To provide easier fire equipment and personnel access in the event of a wildfire
- To replace some of the highly flammable eucalyptus with more fire resistant species
- To increase biodiversity, increase age diversity to better resist wind damage, reduce the potential for insect infestation, and attract wildlife
- To create a more attractive and less hazardous environment for the public

5. What is the approval process for these projects?

Please note that UCSF will decide how to proceed with this proposed project only after extensive interaction with the community. FEMA is in charge of the environmental review process, and is therefore responsible for incorporating any comments on the DEA into the final EA and determining if there will be any significant impacts. If FEMA concludes that there will not be significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) would be issued. If, however, it is determined that there may be significant impacts, FEMA will be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will be subject to further public review. If the EIS is approved, FEMA would issue a Record of Decision (ROD). Following completion of the environmental review process, if the California Emergency Management Agency approves the application, it will begin to release funds to UCSF.

6. In some of the UCSF outreach material, you discuss removing “up to 90% of the ...eucalyptus” and “up to 90% of the brush and [smaller] trees.” That sounds like an excessive amount of trees and shrubs are scheduled for removal.

While the grant applications stated that up to 90% of the “biomass” would be removed, we will engage in a community process to discuss the precise amount to be removed. It is UCSF's intention to remove sufficient biomass to ensure that the fire hazard is mitigated.

7. Mount Sutro is foggy and wet. What data exists that supports the need for a fire mitigation project?

- In December 2008, the City and County of San Francisco adopted the *San Francisco Hazard Mitigation Plan* (http://campusplanning.ucsf.edu/pdf/CCSF_Hazard_Mitigation_Plan.pdf), which identified portions of the Sutro forest as a “Very High Wildfire Hazard” (see page C-13).
- Wildfire has occurred frequently throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1995, for example, the Mount Vision Fire in Point Reyes burned more than 12,000 acres and 45 structures. More recently in October 2008, a fire on Angel Island consumed 400 acres. These areas have similar terrain, climate and vegetation as Mount Sutro.
- Mount Sutro has periodically experienced wildfire. In recent years, there have been three man-made fires that were quickly spotted and extinguished—most recently in 1999.
- The forest is not a “Cloud Forest” (these are native forests found in tropical and subtropical areas of the world), but Mount Sutro does experience fog drip. Fog drip encourages the growth of undesirable highly flammable understory (the area of a forest which grows in the shade of the forest canopy).
- Even a forest that exists in largely foggy conditions becomes dry in the fall. Wildfires in the Bay Area typically occur in September-November when dry, high intensity winds blowing from the northeast combine with high air temperatures and low humidity. Forests with eucalyptus and a high amount of brush, especially the blackberry—as exists throughout Mount Sutro—are particularly susceptible.

8. Does UCSF want to convert the forest back to its native state?

No. UCSF wants only to remove fuel on and near the ground and selectively thin some trees to reduce fire hazards in two demonstration areas. As described in the 2001 Management Plan, UCSF remains committed to improving the health of the forest.

9. Will I see the effects of the proposed projects? Will they look like clear cuts?

No clear cutting is proposed. As currently proposed, the South Ridge area has minimal off-site visibility. As currently proposed, some of the Edgewood Avenue Project would be visible from the north and neighboring homes along Edgewood Avenue. It is currently planned that both areas would continue to appear as forests, only with different densities than other forested areas of Mount Sutro.

10. How will it look up close?

The remaining eucalyptus trees would generally be large trees with open and spreading canopies, with a scattering of native trees among them. There will be trees of all ages and sizes to create an uneven-aged

forest with room to grow. The forest floor will be much more open with more sun exposure and with clearings of native grasses, wildflowers, and brush.

11. What will be the wind, noise, light and visual impacts of the Edgewood Avenue Area Project?

UCSF is committed to working with adjacent neighbors in determining which trees and how many trees in this area would be removed, and where and what new trees would be planted to mitigate any potential impacts. Trees may also be removed in stages with neighbor input.

12. Will the projects cause landslides that will put roads and houses at risk?

No. The remaining vegetation will help infiltrate rainfall. On slopes over 30%, vegetation removal will be done selectively and by hand with this in mind. No private homes are downslope from either of the demonstration areas.

13. Were other options considered?

UCSF does not consider alternatives such as clear cutting and controlled burning to be acceptable. The overall concept of using a mixture of livestock grazing, mechanical equipment, hand labor and limited herbicides appears to be most effective.

14. What kinds of wildlife are there now and will they be impacted?

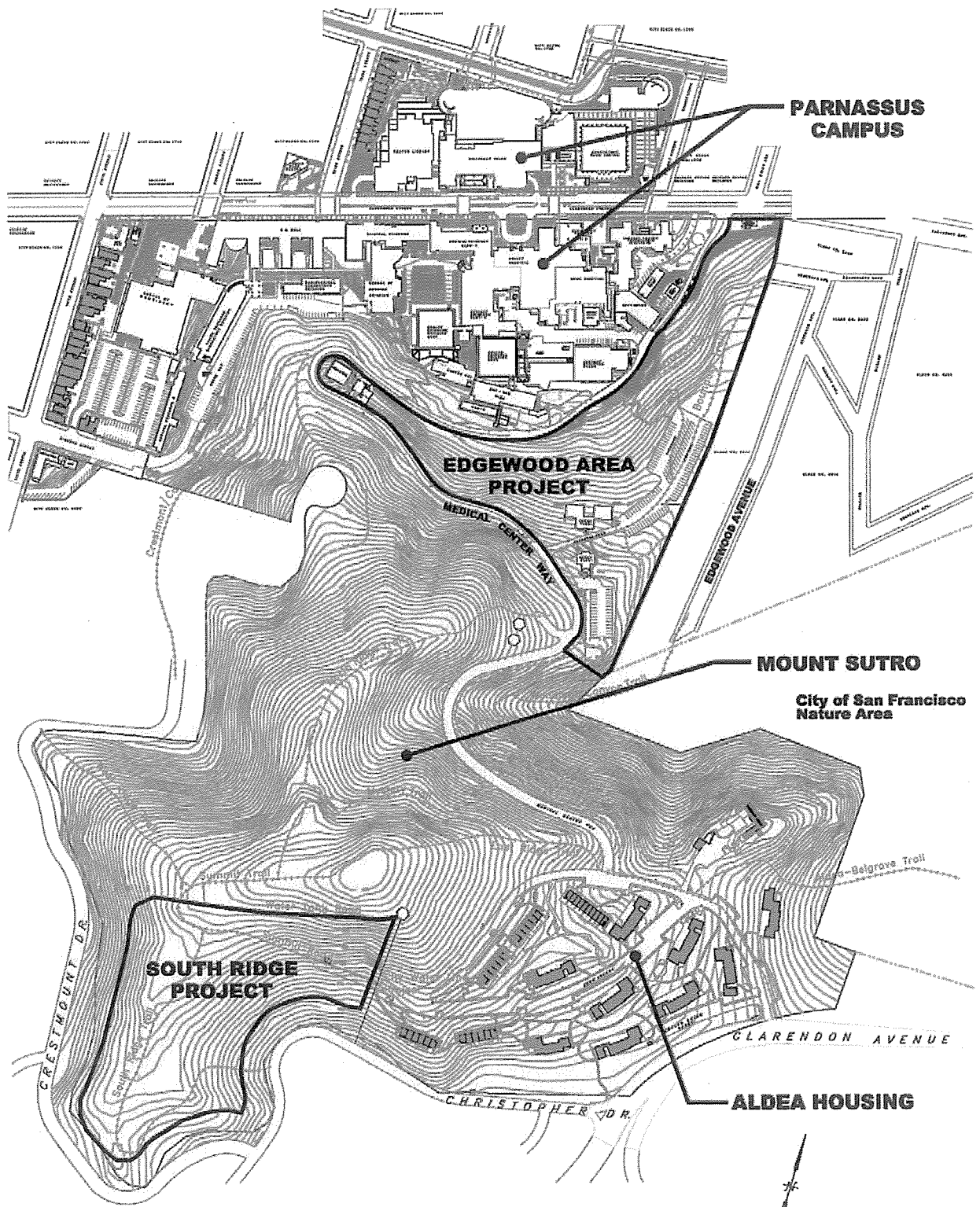
Skunks, raccoons, possums, hawks, owls and other birds have been documented. There are no endangered or threatened species. The proposed projects will benefit wildlife by providing greater opportunities for more appropriate food, cover and nesting native plants to flourish. Native vegetation recently planted by volunteers at the summit in the Rotary Meadow on the Mount Sutro summit immediately attracted birds, butterflies, and insects that had not previously been present. Note that no vegetation removal will be done during the bird nesting season (roughly February through July).

15. Are herbicides being proposed to clear vegetation?

No. UCSF is proposing to limit the use of herbicides to spot treatment of eucalyptus stumps, cut vines and blackberry roots only where needed to prevent regrowth, and where other means of prevention are expected to be ineffective. Pesticides will not migrate off-site primarily because the stumps will absorb them and application will be done long before the rainy season. The use of organic herbicides will be investigated, and if it has been demonstrated that they are effective, they will be used. UCSF is as concerned as the public about the use of pesticides and we intend to minimize use to the greatest extent practicable.

16. How can I get involved?

Please contact Barbara Bagot-López at bblopez@CGR.ucsf.edu or 415-476-8318.



**UCSF / FEMA Mount Sutro
Vegetation Management Projects**

