

# Prepare and Protect

Reduce the impacts of wildfires with tips from the nation's largest urban regional park district.



Photo: East Bay Times

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*Above: Fire danger signs keep visitors informed of fire risks in Regional Parks.*

## Dear East Bay Regional Park District Neighbors,

A year-round fire season is now the “new normal” in California, and we must work together to prevent a catastrophic firestorm here at home. The East Bay Regional Park District is committed to wildfire prevention in our parks.

We are actively working every day, monitoring fire weather conditions, reducing the fire fuel load in our parks, and maintaining healthy forests by thinning excessive growth. While our efforts to reduce the risk of wildfires are extensive, it is the collective efforts of homeowners and neighbors like you that can have the greatest impact. By reducing fire fuels around your home and taking other precautions, you can help prevent small fires from becoming large disasters.

The Park District works 365 days a year in partnership with local and regional fire agencies. Your city or local fire department or agency can provide additional guidance on fuels management, emergency notifications, and evacuation routes.

Sincerely,

**Aileen Theile**

Fire Chief, East Bay Regional Park District

For more information on wildfire safety, visit [www.ebparks.org/about/fire](http://www.ebparks.org/about/fire).



*Fire Chief Aileen Theile assessing wildfire strategies for parklands with her crew of firefighters.*



“CAL FIRE has been an extremely important partner to the Park District for decades. We work in tandem with CAL FIRE to protect our communities against fires in our parks, including hazardous fuel reduction, public education, and wildfire suppression efforts.”

—Fire Chief Aileen Theile



East Bay Regional Park District and CAL FIRE work together to protect homes. In 2018, CAL FIRE funded 24-hour staffing for the Park District’s Fire Station #1 for a total of 50 days during peak fire season.

# Prepare and Protect

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO PREPARE FOR WILDFIRES.

Most of Dawn and Sean Herr's neighborhood in Paradise, Calif., burned to the ground last November during the Camp Fire, the most destructive fire in state history.

But the Herr house survived. One thing that helped: The Herrs had made sure to create what's called defensible space, reducing excess vegetation and following the best practices for their area.

Aileen Theile, fire chief for the East Bay Regional Park District, says now is the time to take a hard look at fire safety in your own backyard.

"It's not just important for one person to do it," she says. "It's really important that an entire neighborhood works together. If you find a homeowner who isn't doing their part, ask why. It could be they're elderly or disabled, or they don't have the financial means to help themselves. Then it should become a community effort."

## Protect Your Home — Ten Things To Do Now

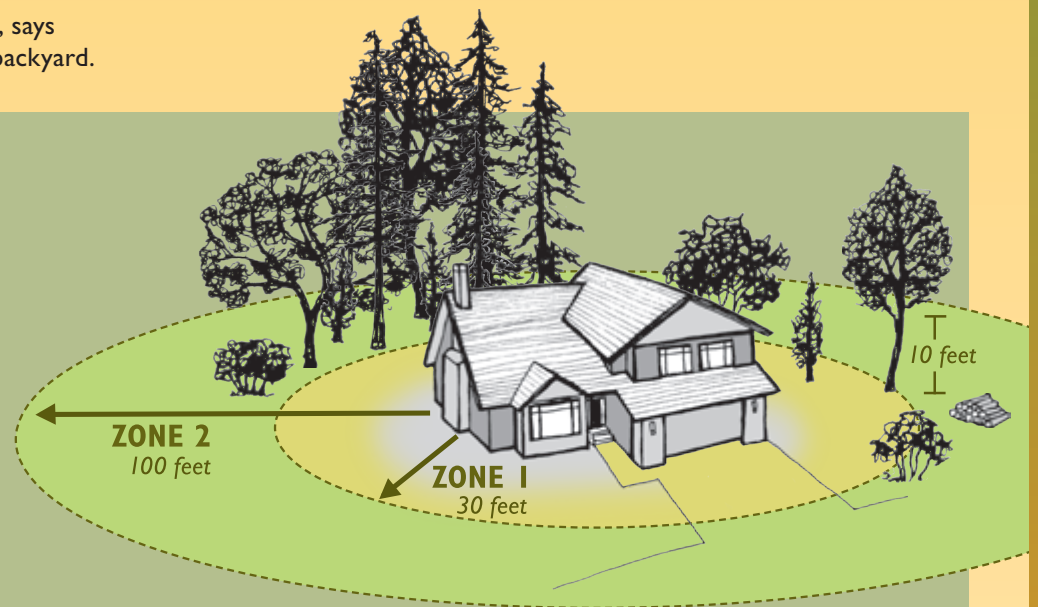
When tackling your own property, it's helpful to divide it into two zones. Here's what to do in 10 easy steps:

### ZONE 1 — 30 Feet of Lean, Clean and Green

1. Remove all dead plants, grass, weeds, and overgrown brush.
2. Clear away leaves, needles, and debris from roofs and rain gutters.
3. Keep tree branches 10 feet away from chimney, roof, and other trees.
4. Move firewood and fuel tanks 30 feet away from house.
5. Remove all items from under deck. Do not use this space for storage.
6. Fire harden your home. Install fine wire mesh over roof, eave, and foundation vents.

### ZONE 2 — 30 to 100 Feet of Reduced Fuel

7. Mow grass to a maximum of 4 inches. Mow before 10 a.m. and never on a hot, windy, or red-flag day.
8. Create vertical spacing between grass, shrubs, and trees. Trim trees 10 feet from the ground and 6 feet from other plants. Large trees do not need to be removed if the plants beneath them are removed. This eliminates the vertical fire ladder.
9. Create horizontal spacing between trees and shrubs.
10. Plant fire-resistant native plants.



### Prepare to Evacuate — 3 Top Tips

Be prepared for the worst. Make a plan today for gathering family members, pets, and valuables in case an approaching wildfire requires evacuation. When an emergency happens, follow these three tips:

- Obey all evacuation orders. Learn different evacuation routes by vehicle or on foot.
- Do not wait to be told to evacuate. If you feel threatened, leave.
- Do not block the roads for fire engines and emergency personnel.

### More Resources

Visit your local fire department's website for more information on defensible space requirements and evacuation procedures. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, also known as CAL FIRE, has more tips on wildfire preparedness and an evacuation checklist at [www.readyforwildfire.com](http://www.readyforwildfire.com).

# Fire Protection by the Numbers

2018 STATISTICS REVEAL STRONG SAFETY RESOURCES.

Last year, the Park District's professional police, fire and lifeguard staff responded to **10,912 calls**, including **25 fire incidents** and **280 opportunities to assist other agencies**. Because the Park District has **two helicopters** with water-dropping capability, its resources are often called upon to fight fires throughout the greater East Bay.

**122,270 acres**

managed by the East Bay Regional Park District.

Park District helicopters

**dropped  
water  
116 times  
on 15 fires.**

**25 wildfires**

were controlled inside our parks and immediately outside park jurisdiction.



**45 firefighters**

(full-time and on-call) were strategically spread out and ready to respond.

**4 remote  
weather  
stations**

within the Regional Parks collected data that helped determine staffing levels and weather patterns.

**8 fire  
deployment  
stations**

strategically located throughout the Regional Parks, with equipment ready to fight fires.

*Park District's helicopter dropping water on wildfire.*

# Staying Ready for Wildfires

FOREST MANAGEMENT, WEATHER STATIONS, AND STATE-OF-THE-ART EQUIPMENT

KEEP PARK DISTRICT ONE STEP AHEAD OF WILDFIRES.



## Fire Hazard Reduction

Each year, the Park District thins and removes vegetation within all parks to reduce fire dangers. This includes clearing heavy underbrush, thinning dense forests, and removing hazardous trees. In 2019, the Park District added a five-person fire hazard reduction crew dedicated year round to decrease fire fuels in East Bay Regional Parks, as well as two fuels reduction coordinators to assist with large fuel reduction projects.

Grazing animals also help keep grasses and other potential fuel in check. About 65 percent of District land is grazed by 6,000 cattle, 1,500 sheep, and 1,600 goats, spread out over about half of the District's parks at any given time.

All of this work goes hand in hand with monitoring effects on habitat and wildlife populations. The Park District also partners with communities and local and state agencies, such as Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) and East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD).

## Remote Weather Stations (RAWS)

RAWS monitor the weather and are part of a nationwide network. Their data can be used to predict fire behavior and track weather and fuel characteristics. Four RAWS are located in the Regional Parks and monitored by the Park District. They are part of a network of 10 RAWS in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

## Special Wildland Equipment

Park District staff are experts in our park terrain, weather, and geography. They also use mechanical expertise to operate a variety of engines and special equipment—such as fire engines that carry 500 gallons and are specifically designed for the off-road conditions found in most of our parks. Here's a look at some of their specialized tools.

### Type 1 Urban Search and Rescue Fire Engine

These engines are used in firefighting and the extrication and initial medical stabilization of victims.

### Type 3 Fire Engine

These wildland fire engines with four-wheel drive, rugged suspension, and high wheel clearance for steep, off-road conditions, are designed especially for fighting wildland fires in the wildland-urban interface.



### Type 6 Fire Engine

These fire engines are smaller and more able to access difficult terrain, allowing rapid response for medical issues and the initial attack on smaller fires.

### Water Tender

Because most wildland fires are far from fire hydrants, firefighters must bring water with them to the site of such fires. Water tenders allow for the transportation of mass amounts of water.

### The Gator

This 4x4, heavy-duty utility vehicle can carry three firefighters and assorted emergency gear.

### The Zodiac Rescue Boat

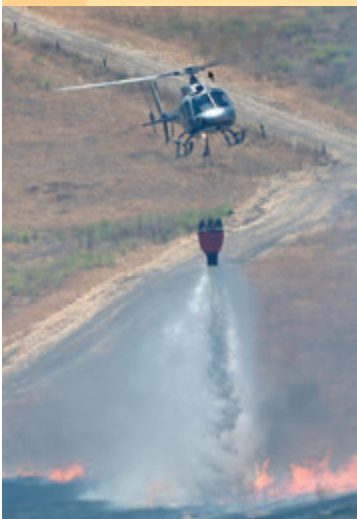
The Zodiac provides search and rescue operations in most East Bay Regional Parks freshwater swimming areas and coastal shorelines.

### Large Animal Rescue

Park District firefighters are trained and equipped with the necessary tools to rescue horses and other disabled animals from trails, ditches, and creeks, as well as to keep rescuers, victims, and animals as safe as possible.

### Helicopter

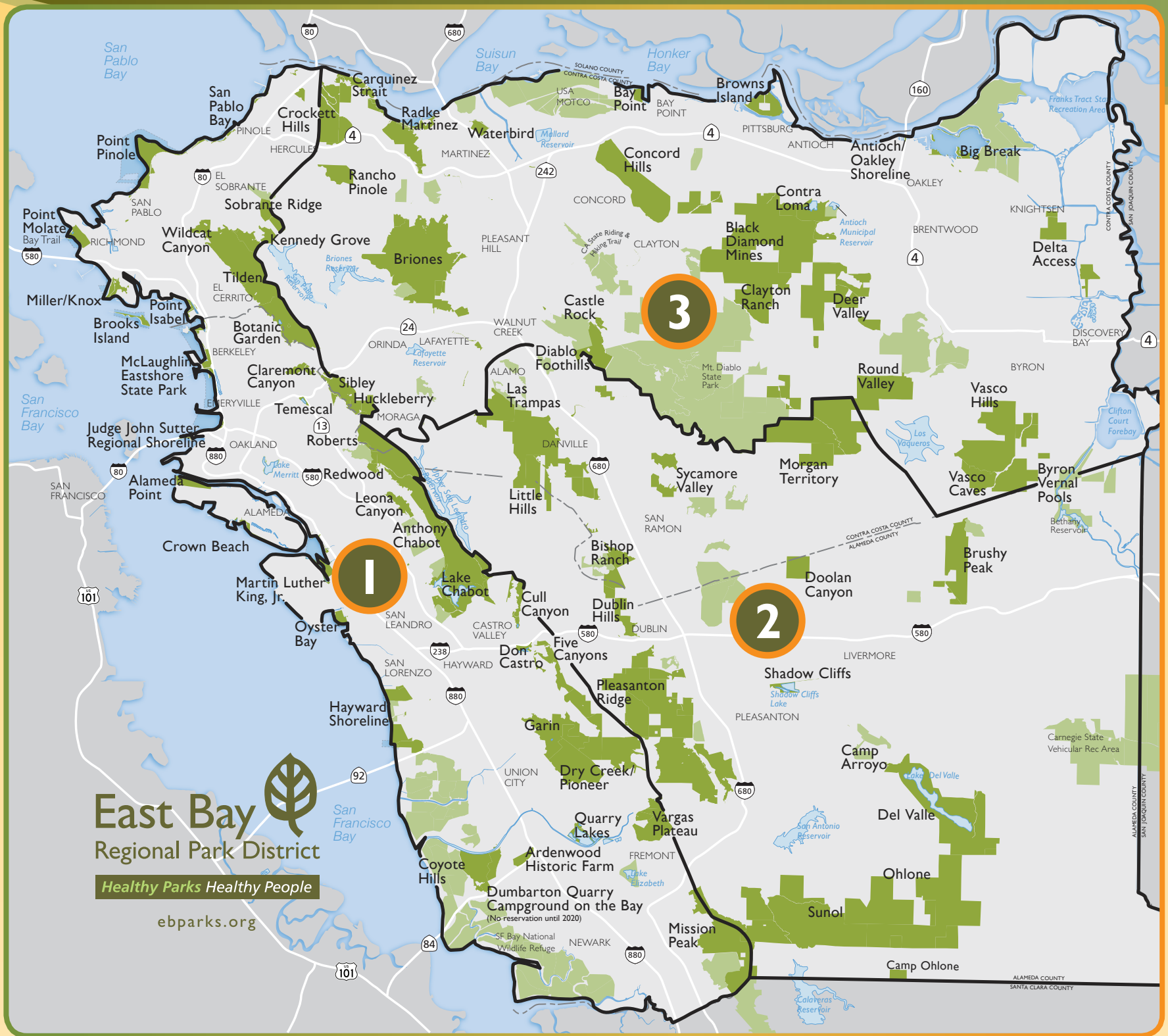
Park District helicopters are used to drop water on wildfires and respond to search and rescues calls, rapidly transporting critical patients from remote locations to safety.



## Specialized Wildland Firefighting Training

East Bay Regional Park District personnel are specially trained in wildland firefighting, including in-house training for employees who work as on-call firefighters. The training includes extinguishing wildland fires, structure fires, and vehicle fires.

The Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Program oversees trainings about medical emergencies, trauma, burn victims, and response to mass casualty incidents. Trainees learn to use defibrillators and oxygen resuscitation equipment and provide basic trauma support.



**East Bay**   
 Regional Park District  
 Healthy Parks Healthy People  
 ebparks.org

*The Park District's 73 Regional Parks preserve critical wildlife habitats, shorelines, lakes, creeks, ranchlands, and historic sites.*

# Updates From Around the District

## THE RISE OF CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRES PROMPTS NEW FUNDING AND CONSTANT VIGILANCE.

Wherever you live in Alameda County or Contra Costa, there is a beautiful regional park within a 15-minute drive. The downside? Fire risk.

“Contra Costa and Alameda County, you’re as vulnerable as Butte County,” pointed out Governor Gavin Newsom, referring to Butte County’s devastating Camp Fire, at a Bay Area news conference this spring. His visit came just a few weeks after he issued an emergency proclamation advancing wildfire safety projects in more than 200 California communities, including collaborative efforts with the East Bay Regional Park District.

The state’s efforts bolster the Park District’s already deep commitment to protecting lives, property, and treasured open spaces. The Park District Fire Department works throughout the year using on-the-ground crews to remove hazardous vegetation—the dense brush, debris, and tall grasses, together referred to as the fuel load. Strategic thinning of forests, especially invasive eucalyptus groves, allows more fire-resistant native species such as oaks, bays, and willows to grow.

The Fire Department uses sophisticated equipment to monitor weather and wildfire conditions, setting park rules and restrictions based on current risk. In addition, many site-specific efforts are currently underway.

Here’s an overview:

### 1 Bayside to Hillside — Richmond to Fremont

The East Bay Regional Park District is a founding member of the Hills Emergency Forum (HEF), a collaboration of fire departments and public governing agencies working together to assess, prevent/mitigate, prepare and respond to fires in the East Bay Hills. This area includes some of the most fire-prone areas in the East Bay and stretches from the San Pablo Bay north of Richmond to southern San Francisco Bay near Fremont. It includes hillside parks, such as Tilden, Redwood, and Anthony Chabot, as well as shoreline parks such as Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach

and Hayward Shoreline. Goat grazing is important for these parks where vegetation and grasses need to be managed frequently. Goats help remove everything from flammable vegetation to non-native species.

Fall 2018’s election day was November 6, just two days before the outbreak of the Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise and is now the state’s most destructive fire on record. On that day, voters in western Alameda and Contra Costa counties passed Measure FF with an unprecedented majority of 85.6 percent. The measure provides \$66 million over the next 20 years for regional park services and improvements, including wildfire protection, public safety, public access, and habitat protection and restoration.

This funding extends the work of Measure CC, passed in 2004 and addresses areas near the 1991 Tunnel Fire. That fire, also known as the Oakland-Berkeley Firestorm, now ranks as the third most destructive fire in California history.

The Park District’s “Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan” for the area was developed with community input and with exhaustive review by local, regional, state, and federal agencies. It provides site-specific goals and direction for fuels management treatments on nearly 140 Recommended Treatment Areas, totaling approximately 3,000 acres in densely-wooded, fire-prone areas nearest to neighborhoods.

### 2 San Ramon Valley and Tri-Valley — San Ramon, Danville, Dublin, Pleasanton and Livermore

The rapidly growing population centers south of Mount Diablo enjoy many of the District’s largest parks, including Las Trampas, Pleasanton Ridge, and Sunol.

Ongoing fire protection includes regular maintenance, such as mowing tall grasses along roads and trails, and pruning trees and brush to reduce fire hazards and allow clear access for fire-fighting equipment. An extensive cattle-grazing program also keeps wildfires in check.

Of special interest, the 2018-19 state budget contains \$5.1 million earmarked for improvements at Del Valle Regional Park, the lakefront jewel 10 miles south of Livermore. The funding supports water-delivery infrastructure and other critical upgrades for the 4,395-acre park.

In this area, the Park District partners with other fire agencies including the Alameda County Fire Department, Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department, and San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District.

### 3 Central to East Contra Costa — Orinda to the Sacramento Delta

The suburban communities along Highway 24, north on 680, and east on Highway 4 share inspiring views of Mount Diablo. They also enjoy proximity to hiking, recreation, and history at beloved parks such as Briones and Black Diamond Mines. Cattle grazing is key to reducing fire risks and keeping fire fuels in check in these parks.

Governor Newsom’s 2019 emergency proclamation is helping a coalition of agencies to immediately work on a project called the North Orinda Fuel Break. It is designed to protect a vast area from Hercules and Pinole to Concord and Walnut Creek. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, the project has the potential to reduce the fire risk for 561,000 people in 30 East Bay communities.

This project complements the Park District’s wildfire protection efforts. Weather stations, such as the one at Black Diamond Mines, adjacent to Pittsburg and Antioch, supply daily temperatures, dew point, humidity, wind speed, wind direction, precipitation, and more. “There is a daily transmission of weather conditions to all park staff,” says Park District Fire Chief Aileen Theile. “It lets them know what the burn index is going to be and what restrictions are in place, so we can keep our park visitors safe.”

In this area, the Park District partners with other fire agencies including the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, and Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

# A Safe and Healthy Forest

DEMONSTRATION AREAS SHOWCASE FIRE PROTECTION EFFORTS.



**Before forest thinning**



**After forest thinning**

Next time you hike in the East Bay hills, keep a look out for new interpretive panels designed to inform visitors about the Park District's fire safety efforts. The signs in Tilden, Sibley, and Wildcat Canyon demonstrate how overgrown, unhealthy forests increase the risk and intensity of wildfires. Tilden has three demonstration areas at Lone Oak Road, Tower Trailhead at Grizzly Peak Boulevard, and Selby Trail at Golf Course Road. Sibley has one at the Grizzly Peak Boulevard walk-in gate near Skyline Boulevard, and Wildcat Canyon has one at Alvarado Staging Area.

"Before" and "After" photos reveal what happens when fire protection crews work to thin forests using selective removal of densely-crowded trees and overgrown, flammable debris. The result is a shaded "fuelbreak" designed to reduce the potential for wildfire to spread into other areas.

These efforts help native species such as oak and bay trees to grow and thrive under the open canopy along with a rich understory of plants, including native shrubs and annual wildflowers.

The Park District gives special attention to invasive and non-native eucalyptus trees. These trees were brought to California in the late 1870s by prospectors hoping to get rich by harvesting and selling the fast-growing Australian imports as lumber for houses.

However, the lumber cracked and was unsuitable for building, and by 1910 there were 3 million abandoned eucalyptus trees across the East Bay hills. Because eucalyptus trees have no biological enemies here, they can quickly choke out native vegetation, reducing biodiversity and degrading ecosystem health.

For more information, visit [ebparks.org/about/fire](http://ebparks.org/about/fire).



## EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT WILDFIRE PROTECTION PARTNERS

### HELPFUL RESOURCES AND LOCAL FIRE AGENCIES (NON-EMERGENCIES)

- East Bay Regional Park District, (510) 881-1833
- CAL FIRE, (408) 779-2121
- East Bay Municipal Utility District, (866) 403-2683
- Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, (510) 486-4000
- University of California, Berkeley, (510) 642-6760
- Alameda County Fire Department, (925) 833-3473 (Castro Valley, Dublin, Emeryville, Hayward, Newark, San Leandro, San Lorenzo, Sunol, Union City)
- Alameda Fire Department, (510) 337-2100
- Albany Fire Department, (510) 528-5770
- Berkeley Fire Department, (510) 981-3473
- Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, (925) 941-3300 (Antioch, Bay Point, Clayton, Concord, El Sobrante, Lafayette, Martinez, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, San Pablo, Walnut Creek)
- Crockett-Carquinez Fire Department, (510) 787-2717 (Crockett, Port Costa)
- East Contra Costa Fire Protection District, (925) 634-3400 (Bethel Island, Brentwood, Byron, Discovery Bay, Knightsen, Oakley)
- El Cerrito Fire Department, (510) 215-4450
- Fremont Fire Department, (510) 494-4200
- Hayward Fire Department, (510) 583-4930
- Kensington Fire Protection District, (510) 527-8395
- Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Department, (925) 454-2361 (Livermore, Pleasanton)
- Moraga-Orinda Fire District, (925) 258-4599 (Moraga, Orinda)
- Oakland Fire Department, (510) 238-3851
- Piedmont Fire Department, (510) 420-3030
- Pinole Fire Department, (510) 724-9053
- Richmond Fire Department, (510) 307-8031
- Rodeo-Hercules Fire District, (510) 799-4561 (Hercules, Rodeo)
- San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District, (925) 838-6600 (Alamo, Danville, San Ramon)