

**CITY OF ALBANY
PARKS RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: May 13, 2021

SUBJECT: Eucalyptus Disease Study, Albany Hill
Informational Presentation

REPORT BY: Margot Cunningham, Natural Areas Coordinator
John Hawkridge, Urban Forester

SUMMARY

The Commission is being presented with a plan to remove sections of four Blue Gum Eucalyptus, approximately 10 inches in diameter each, near the Taft turnaround on Albany Hill. These removals were initiated by the Natural Areas Coordinator and Urban Forester for research into the causes of decline in Eucalyptus on the Hill. Each of these four trees are multi-stemmed. The sections being removed represent the smaller stems on each tree, and technically are not tree removals.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Informational. This project is in accordance with criteria in the Albany Hill/Creekside Park Vegetation Management Plan.

BACKGROUND

Eucalyptus trees on Albany Hill have been exhibiting declining symptoms since last fall. Leaves, branches and limbs have been dying and some entire trees appear to be dead. This is creating increased risk to the public in terms of both tree failure and potential fire risk.

The City has engaged the services of a tree consulting firm, SBCA Tree Consulting, to assess the health and safety of the eucalyptus and make recommendations for management. At the same time plant pathologists from the USDA Forest Service and UC Berkeley contacted the City about sampling eucalyptus to find out what may be causing the trees to decline.

The sections of trees to be removed are needed for analysis in the hope of determining the pathogen(s) responsible for decline. Identification of the pathogen(s) may be useful in management of the Albany Hill eucalyptus population, which may carry over to other eucalyptus forests in the Bay Area.

DISCUSSION

The researcher who will sample the cut eucalyptus for pathogens is Matteo Garbelotto, Ph.D., Director U.C. Berkeley Forest Pathology and Mycology Laboratory, Statewide U.C. Forest Pathology Extension Specialist, Adj. Full Professor, Department of ESPM, University of California at Berkeley.

Dr. Garbelotto has requested sampling trees that are about 10 inches in diameter, symptomatic but still alive, and preferably not immediately adjacent to one another.

We chose an area on Albany Hill where trees are exhibiting symptoms of decline and away from monarch clustering habitat. This area is around and north of the Taft turnaround, which is the main entrance to Albany Hill Park near the top of the Hill.

Steve Batchelder, CEO of SBCA Tree Consulting and a C-27 Licensed Contractor, Certified Arborist, and Certified Urban Forester, will cut the trees. SBCA is doing this as part of the overall assessment of the Albany Hill Blue Gum Eucalyptus population.

The Garbelotto team will bring tools for cutting wood pieces from the trees and take them to their lab for analysis. They have conducted a similar study on dying acacias in the Bay Area as well as studies on Sudden Oak Death throughout California. For more information see <https://www.suddenoakdeath.org/bay-area-tree-mortality/>. Dr. Garbelotto is considered the authority on SOD and a leading researcher on other tree diseases.

This work is essential due to the risks the trees pose to public safety. Although this work does not technically entail complete tree removal, Section 1.a. of the City Tree Removal Policy allows for the removal of any City tree that poses a clear and imminent danger to the safety of the general public as determined by the Urban Forester without the prior notice or issuance of a City Tree Removal Permit.¹

The Vegetation Management Plan for Albany Hill and Cerrito Creek details conditions for removal as well. Under Plan Goals and Objectives on page 9, one of the goals is to remove trees that threaten human safety due to unstable growth or serious fire danger.²

The trees to be cut for sampling meet both of these criteria. Multi-trunked trees are weaker structurally and produce more fire-hazardous debris than single-trunked trees. All targeted trees for sampling are not healthy, having dropped some or most of their leaves, presenting fire and safety risks.

The Vegetation Management Plan for Albany Hill and Cerrito Creek also includes Recommended Actions for Eucalyptus on the Hill, and one of the actions is selective removal from denser stands (p. 9). The first priority of removal is to cut multiple-stemmed trees to result in a single leader (p. 9).²

We will prioritize removal of single trunks about 10 inches in diameter from multi-trunked trees, however Dr Garbelotto may require removal of a single-stemmed tree, in which case we will determine the tree(s) based on the criteria outlined above.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

The project should not affect monarch butterfly habitat because the trees to be sampled are located in areas where monarchs have not historically clustered. Stuart Weiss, Ph.D., author of the Albany Hill Monarch Habitat Assessment³ evaluated tree removals for the trail improvement project in 2018, writing:

Observed cluster sites start at the physical summit ~100 m (330 ft.) south of the turnaround and extend south for ~200 m (660 ft.) along the ridge

The current conditions near the turnaround appear to be too shady to attract monarch clusters, but are well sheltered from winds ...

In an Apr 26, 2021 email response to our query about cutting trees near the Taft turnaround Dr. Weiss writes that north of the turnaround is best, but close to the turnaround north from the summit should be OK. He also wrote that it is very important to get the information on the pathogen. Most of the trees we scoped as candidates are north or northwest of the Taft turnaround.

Per the Migratory Bird Treaty Act as well as California State Codes 3503 and 3503.5, bird nests are to be protected while there is active nesting. California Department of Fish and Wildlife have defined nesting season as February 1st through September 1st. Bird nest surveys will be conducted in the area before work.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Tree work will be conducted through the tree assessment contract with SBCA Tree Consulting, which is funded from the annual budget for Albany Hill.

REFERENCES CITED

1. City of Albany, City Tree Removal Policy and Procedures
2. City of Albany, 2012, Vegetation Management Plan, Albany Hill and Cerrito Creek
3. Weiss, Stuart, 2018, Albany Hill Monarch Habitat Assessment
4. Weiss, Stuart, 2018, Evaluation of Tree Removal and ADA Trail Construction Impacts on Monarch Butterfly Habitat Suitability on Albany Hill

ATTACHMENTS

Photos of possible trees to be sampled. These and more photos at:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/WbhEGbY3VxiJhFnYA>

