



STAFF REPORT

Meeting Type: Planning Committee/ Board of Directors
Title: Marin Water Prescribed Burning Update
From: Carl Sanders, Natural Resources Program Manager
Through: Shaun Horne, General Manager
Meeting Date: October 27, 2026

TYPE OF ITEM: Approve X Review and Comment

RECOMMENDATION: Review and comment on the Marin Water Prescribed Burning Update

SUMMARY: Staff will provide an update on Marin Water's Biodiversity, Fire, and Fuels Integrated Plan Fiscal Year 26/27 Prescribed Burning activities. The District, in collaboration with Marin County Fire Department, completed two prescribed burn projects on the watershed and has one additional project planned for this year. Staff have developed an additional 469 acres of prescribed burn plans for 2028.

DISCUSSION: In October 2019, the District adopted the Biodiversity, Fire, and Fuels Integrated Plan (BFFIP), which describes the actions the District will implement to reduce wildfire hazards and to maintain and enhance ecosystem functions on District watershed lands. Specifically, Management Action 24.2 'Improve Grasslands and Oak Woodlands' provides direction on the use of prescribed fire to reduce fuel loads and improve ecological functions within these vegetation communities. Most plant communities on the watershed are adapted to and benefit from a low intensity, high frequency fire regime that was common in California prior to European colonization. Research has shown that five-to-fifteen-year wildfire intervals, significantly influenced by indigenous peoples, occurred across most vegetation communities found in the California coast range. As a result, native flora and fauna across much of California thrives with frequent, low intensity wildfires and wildfire hazards can be reduced overtime through re-occurring treatments.

The most recent significant wildfire on Mt. Tamalpais occurred in 1945. Eighty-one years of fire suppression, coupled with an abundance of sudden oak death (SOD) tree mortality and the spread of flammable invasive species such as French broom, have added to the fuel load and made watershed forests and woodlands far more vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires. The increased use of prescribed fire by Marin Water and other local Marin County agencies as a management tool for reducing fuels attempts to reintroduce this critical ecological process back on the watershed to promote forest resilience, enhanced biodiversity and reduce the risk of catastrophic stand-replacing wildfires.

Since adoption of the BFFIP in 2019, the District has successfully implemented numerous prescribed burn projects in coordination with Marin County Fire Department (MCFD) and other regional partners. These projects have demonstrated the effectiveness of prescribed fire for reducing hazardous fuel loads, supporting native ecosystems, controlling invasive vegetation, and improving landscape resilience. Broadcast burning under the current BFFIP is authorized within several Management Actions, including treatments within conifer forests, mixed hardwood forests, grasslands, oak woodlands, and habitat restoration areas.

On June 16, 2026, the Board of Directors approved an Addendum to the BFFIP to increase the annual prescribed burning threshold from 160 acres/year to 1,000 acres/year. To achieve this increased burn acre threshold, Marin Water currently has Burn Plans in place for 306 acres across multiple vegetation units carefully selected and strategically aligned with other mechanical fuel and forest treatments. In coordination with MCFD, Marin Water is currently drafting another set of Burn Plans for future implementation that will cover an additional 469 acres.

In 2025, Marin Water burned 106 acres within the 'Knob II' Burn Plan unit adjacent to Bon Tempe reservoir. In 2026, Marin Water burned an additional 124 acres across the 'Knob I' and 'Pine Point' burn units, also near Bon Tempe reservoir. There is one additional project planned for the week of October 19.

Marin Water and One Tam agency partners have secured over \$15 million in State grant funding since 2023 to advance forest resiliency and prescribed burning projects, including over \$9 million secured for Marin Water. Additional funding requests and grant proposals have been submitted to funding agencies totaling nearly \$56 million (\$18.6 million for Marin Water) for public lands in Marin County. In support of this work, the Board also approved a Memorandum of Agreement with MCFD in 2024, further strengthening the partnership needed to scale up prescribed burning.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: The District's Board of Directors certified the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the BFFIP (State Clearinghouse Number 2017012007) on October 15, 2019 (Marin Water District, 2019). The BFFIP PEIR was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to assess the environmental effects of the BFFIP.

On July 11, 2026, the Board adopted an addendum describing the changes and additions to the BFFIP and BFFIP PEIR (referred to as the "revised BFFIP" and "revised BFFIP PEIR", respectively), to increase the number of acres that could be burned on an annual basis. The addendum found that the revisions to the BFFIP and BFFIP PEIR would not result in new significant impacts, nor would the revisions substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15162), concluding that an addendum (CEQA Guidelines Section 15164) was the appropriate approach to document the changes since certification of the BFFIP PEIR.

FISCAL IMPACT: Not Applicable.

ATTACHMENT(S): None.