

## Mowing for fuel breaks

As stewards of Santa Clara County's watersheds and hundreds of miles of streams, the Santa Clara Valley Water District maintains fuel breaks for public safety and for avoidance of property damage caused by fire.

The District complies with California Government code section 51182, which requires the maintenance of a firebreak within 30 feet of occupied structures on its property by removing flammable vegetation or combustible growth.

California Government code 51184 states: Section 51182 shall not apply to any land or water acquired or managed for lands kept in a predominantly natural state as habitat for wildlife, plant, or animal communities.

The District also follows guidance recommended by the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office by clearing flammable vegetation on its property located within 30 feet of structures on neighboring properties.

## District right-of-way defined

This sheet provides information about the District's weed abatement on District property and easements. District right-of-way includes:

- Property owned by the District in fee title which is managed with available resources consistent with federal, state and local laws and ordinances;
- Property where the District has an exclusive easement, where the property owner is effectively excluded from actively using the property; and
- Property where the District has an easement for flood protection, storm drainage or water conservation purposes.



Boom mowing on Thompson Creek, San Jose.



Mowed area on West Little Llagas Creek, Gilroy.

## Managing weeds on district property

The District routinely mows along property fence-lines, creek & levee slopes, flood plains, vacant parcels, percolation ponds, pipelines, dams & reservoirs, canals, and other water utility facilities on its property. Most trails are maintained by the city within whose jurisdiction they fall. Mowing typically begins in March, continuing through spring and summer.

The District considers several criteria when scheduling mowing throughout the County:

- Localized weather conditions; generally, the hotter, drier areas are mowed first.
- Inspection requirements for U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) levees, which must occur by end of June.
- Resident concerns; complaints are documented and resolved.
- The number of mowing crews available to perform the work. The District employs 3-4 boom mowers and 3-4 contract labor crews in addition to regular staff. The District manages over 3,000 acres of upland vegetation each year for maintenance access and fire code compliance.

## Mowing activities

The District's mowing activities include the use of:

- Mechanical boom mowers; typically used on larger parcels or longer creeks
- Walk-behind mowers
- Hand weed eaters
- Goats to graze parcels

## Mowing requirements

- Grasses and weeds are mowed when greater than 6 inches in height
- Flammable vegetation is removed within 30 feet of an occupied structure such as house or garage.
- Parcels less than 1 acre are mowed in entirety; the perimeter is mowed if the parcel is larger than an acre; if the parcel is larger than 5 acres, the perimeter and cross-breaks are mowed.

## Responsibility for fuel abatement where the District has an easement

Easements typically provide the District with rights to conduct activities for flood protection purposes, which generally do not include an obligation to provide fuel breaks.

At its discretion, the District may provide weed abatement on easements for access purposes.

The District will not perform weed abatement on easements or on private property for concerns such as:

- Nuisances such as vegetation harboring unwanted wildlife.
- Aesthetic considerations, such as vegetation blocking views or appearing "unsightly" in a creek channel.

## Responsibility for weeds on private property

Private property owners are responsible for weed abatement and for maintaining a fuel break on their property, even if the District has an easement.



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Goat grazing on Canoas Creek, San Jose.

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### CONTACT US

For more information, contact **Fidel Gonzalez** at **(408)630-3856** or visit our website at [valleywater.org](http://valleywater.org) and use our Access Valley Water customer request and information system. With three easy steps, you can use this service to find out the latest information on district projects or to submit questions, complaints or compliments directly to a district staff person.

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