



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Leigh Ann Gessner

650-773-3638, lgessner@openspace.org

Midpen Open Space proactively increasing fuels management

LOS ALTOS, Calif. [July 18, 2019] — At their regular public meeting last week, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District board of directors more than doubled the acreage of open space land available for proactive fuels management projects over the next year.

An additional 210 acres, which have already gone through an environmental review process as part of Midpen’s integrated pest management program, can now be included in Midpen’s current fuels management work. Projects include creating new fuel breaks, as well as maintaining vegetation in existing fuel breaks and along evacuation routes for increased wildland fire safety.

Midpen staff worked with local fire agencies to identify high-priority areas for additional fuels reduction work near the wildland urban interface, including parts of Bear Creek Redwoods, Saratoga Gap, Windy Hill and Picchetti Ranch open space preserves.

“A changing climate, 150 years of fire suppression and a growing population are combining to create a longer and more intense fire season in California,” Midpen Senior Resource Specialist Coty Sifuentes-Winter said. “To meet these current challenges, Midpen Open Space is proactively expanding our environmentally sensitive fuels management.”

In addition to increasing fuels management now, Midpen is working on a state-required environmental impact report that will allow the public agency to continue expanding fuels management work into new areas of its preserves beginning next year, and to reintroduce prescribed fire to its land management toolbox in 2022. This year, Midpen also began a new forest management pilot program aimed at increasing forest health and resilience to wildland fire, while reducing fuel loads.

Wildland fire prevention, preparation and response are central to Midpen’s land stewardship. Staff work year round maintaining hundreds of miles of fuel breaks and fire roads. More than 11,000 acres of Midpen’s public open space lands are grazed by cattle to help restore native grasslands, while reducing fuels for fire safety. Midpen provides annual fire suppression training to staff who are often first responders to fires and assist fire departments including as ecological advisors. Smoking, campfires and firearms are never allowed in Midpen open space preserves.

“Fire is a fact of life in California, and everyone plays a role in living safely with it. Midpen’s role is to manage our open space lands for public safety and ecological health, while coordinating closely with local fire departments responsible for fire suppression,” Sifuentes-Winter said. “The public plays a role, too, in preventing wildland fires from starting and in protecting their homes with defensible space.”