



Recommendation for Action

File #: 23-2529, **Agenda Item #:** 53.

9/21/2023

Posting Language

Approve the Recommended Land Management Strategies and Climate Vulnerability Analysis for Austin Parks and Recreation Department natural areas.

Lead Department

Parks and Recreation Department.

Fiscal Note

This item has no fiscal impact.

For More Information:

Kimberly McNeeley, Director, Parks and Recreation, 512-974-6722; Amanda Ross, Division Manager, 512-978-2601; Matt McCaw, Program Manager, 512-974-6770.

Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:

July 24, 2023 - Unanimously recommended by the Parks and Recreation Board on an 8-0 vote. Recommendation No. 20230724-4.

August 2, 2023 - Recommended by the Environmental Commission with additional recommendations on a 8-0 vote with Commissioner Brimer abstaining from the vote. Recommendation No. 20230802-005.

Additional Backup Information:

The 2019 Wildfire Preparedness Audit found that the Parks and Recreation Department had little capacity to mitigate wildfire risk. In response, the Department committed to establish a land management team to create and implement land management plans to reduce the threat of wildfire. The Recommended Land Management Strategies and Climate Vulnerability Analysis is the document that will guide Parks and Recreation Department's efforts to actively restore natural areas to mitigate wildfire risk and provide vital ecosystem services to Austin in perpetuity.

The document encompasses more than 10,000 acres of parkland natural areas and contains a land acknowledgement, ecosystem specific site analyses, management goals, restoration strategies, and guidance on environmental monitoring and analysis. In addition, it contains an innovative climate vulnerability analysis that: 1) identifies climate-driven stressors that collectively increase the probability of intense wildfire on parkland, and 2) creates custom indices to map risk across landscapes and communities to help inform land management strategies that are targeted and cost-effective.

Analyses also prioritize equity by incorporating measures of social vulnerability as a component of community-level risk. Both environmental and social vulnerability, as well as proximity and density of neighboring structures, will be used along with operational considerations to create work plans and prioritize implementation of restoration strategies.

Multiple City sponsored long-range plans supported the creation of this technical guiding document, including:

- Austin/Travis County Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (CWPP)
- Austin Climate Equity Plan
- Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan for 2020-2030
- Green Infrastructure Strengths and Gaps Assessment for the City of Austin
- Nine parks vision plans

Restoring healthy, fire-resilient natural areas in the face of climate change will require a holistic and proactive approach. Strategies used for this type of work will include but not be limited to fuel mitigation or selective thinning for woodland health, brush management for grassland restoration, invasive species removal, prescribed burning where appropriate following national operational standards, and seeding and planting.

Council approval will allow the Parks and Recreation Department to deliver one of the key commitments made in response to the 2019 Wildfire Preparedness Audit; to create and implement land management plans for parkland natural areas to address wildfire risk. It will support the Parks and Recreation Department to obtain the necessary resources and align activities to restore natural areas to mitigate risk, improve resilience, and provide ecosystem services to Austin in perpetuity.