

5.14 Recreation

This section summarizes the impacts to recreation due to implementing either the Proposed Program or any of the Alternatives.

5.14.1 Significance Criteria

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the CEQA Environmental Checklist, poses the following to be considered in determining whether the Program or Alternatives would cause significant impacts to recreation. The Program and Alternatives would create significant effects if they would:

- a) Reduce the quality of recreational experience resulting from presence of highly visible blackened areas;
- b) Reduce the quality of recreational experience resulting from presence of highly visible areas cleared of vegetation by mechanical or manual treatments;
- c) Reduce the quality of recreational experience resulting from presence of highly visible areas of dead and browned vegetation resulting from herbicide control of non-native exotic plants and/or noxious weeds;
- d) Reduce the recreational enjoyment due to the presence of increased smoke;
- e) Require temporary exclusion of visitors from or closure of recreational facilities during treatments.

5.14.2 Methodology

Estimate the temporal and spatial extent of VTP treatments likely to take place on state parks or other publicly accessible lands eligible for VTP treatments. Consider potential treatments to high-use vs. low-use recreation sites as presented in Section 4.14.

Estimate the potential need to close state parks and other recreation sites during treatments, and the duration of such closures.

5.14.3 Determination Threshold

An effect is considered significant if it would:

- a) Close more than 1% of state park lands, or other public recreational areas because of VTP treatments during the peak visitor season over a calendar year.
- b) Severely reduce visual quality (more than 80% burned and black, cleared of vegetation, or comprised of dead plants) on more than 10% of the area of any one state park, private recreation area or other publicly accessible recreational area, during the peak visitor season over a calendar year.

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5.14.4 Data and Assumptions

The VTP jurisdiction area includes the following amounts of land open to public recreation (see Section 4.14):

- 1.4 million acres of State Park Lands,
- ~ 1 million acres of DFG and CAL FIRE lands
- ~ 2 million acres of Conservancy lands

These ~3.4 million acres of land constitute the vast majority of lands whose recreational opportunities could be affected by VTP projects. Assuming that these lands have an equal probability of receiving VTP projects as other lands within CAL FIRE jurisdiction allows extrapolation of Table 5.0.1 to estimate the percentage of recreational lands that are likely to be affected by VTP treatments annually under the Proposed Program (Table 5.14.1).

Bioregion	All Treatments	Prescribed Fire	Mechanical	Hand	Herbicides	Prescribed Herbivory
North Coast/Klamath	0.31%	0.07%	0.31%	0.31%	0.13%	0.31%
Modoc	0.62%	0.02%	0.62%	0.62%	0.38%	0.62%
Sacramento Valley	2.05%	0.49%	2.05%	2.05%	0.84%	2.05%
Sierra	0.65%	0.16%	0.65%	0.65%	0.27%	0.65%
Bay Area	0.47%	0.11%	0.47%	0.47%	0.19%	0.47%
San Joaquin	0.65%	0.16%	0.65%	0.65%	0.27%	0.65%
Central Coast	0.76%	0.19%	0.76%	0.76%	0.30%	0.76%
Mojave	0.06%	0.01%	0.06%	0.06%	0.03%	0.06%
South Coast	0.75%	0.15%	0.75%	0.75%	0.31%	0.75%
Colorado Desert	0.35%	0.09%	0.35%	0.35%	0.13%	0.35%

Recreational areas near metropolitan areas receive more use than remote recreational areas (Section 4.14). VTP treatments in these high use areas would be likely to directly and indirectly affect more people than treatments in remote areas. It is assumed that likelihood of VTP treatments occurring is equal between high and low use recreation areas.

5.14.5 Direct Effects Common to all Bioregions From Implementing the Program/Alternatives

Effects to recreational resources due to implementing the Proposed Program are likely to be small scale, short term and not significant (Table 5.14.2).

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Bioregion	Prescribed Fire	Mechanical	Hand	Herbivory
Klamath/North Coast	NA	NA	NA	NA
Modoc	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sacramento Valley	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sierra	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bay Area	NA	NA	NA	NA
San Joaquin	NA	NA	NA	NA
Central Coast	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mojave	NA	NA	NA	NA
South Coast	NA	NA	NA	NA
Colorado Desert	NA	NA	NA	NA

^{1/} Key to effects; adverse effects are those effects which degrade the diversity, structure, size, integrity, abundance or number of; or are outside the natural range of variability, for the resource at issue. Beneficial effects are those effects that improve the diversity, structure, size, integrity, abundance or number of; or are within the natural range of variability, for the resource at issue. SA/SB – significant adverse effects are those effects that are substantial, highly noticeable, at the watershed scale; and often irreversible. MA/MB - moderately adverse or beneficial effects - those effects that can be detected beyond the affected area, but are transitory and usually reversible. NA/NB - negligible adverse or beneficial effects - those effects that are imperceptible or undetectable.

It is likely that lands subject to VTP treatments would be closed to recreational use for the duration of the project, which is not likely to exceed two weeks. The area affected for recreational use may exceed the boundaries of the project area for prescribed burning projects due to smoke generation. For non-burning treatments, the area affected for recreational use is not likely to exceed the project boundaries. Under the Proposed Program, it is unlikely that VTP projects would be implemented on more than 1% of recreational lands per year for all bioregions, except the Sacramento Valley Bioregion (Table 5.14.1).

Implementation of VTP projects is likely to be spread over the entire year, with many projects occurring in non-peak visitation months. Peak visitor use tends to occur during the summer months for many recreational areas (Section 4.14). Prescribed fire, which is the most common treatment type, is most commonly implemented in fall, winter and spring, which are off-peak months for recreational use.

5.14.6 Bioregion-Specific Direct Effects of Implementing the Program/ Alternatives

In the Sacramento Valley Bioregion where >2% of recreational lands could be subject to closures each year, it is not likely that these closures would occur simultaneously. Thus, it is very unlikely that more than 1% of recreational areas in the Sacramento Valley or any other bioregion would be closed simultaneously due to VTP projects (Determination Criteria 1).

5.14.7 Indirect Effects of Implementing the Program/Alternatives

An indirect effect to recreational use includes decreased visual quality for users due to presence of recently treated VTP projects in their viewshed. According to Table 5.0.7 over 98% of watersheds in the state would have fewer than 10% of their area treated with VTP projects each year under the Proposed Program. For surface fire vegetation types it is unlikely that any VTP treatment would result in a viewshed where more than 80% of the area was burned and black, cleared of vegetation, or comprised of dead plants (Determination Threshold 2). For crown fire vegetation types it is possible that VTP treatments could result in more than 80% of the project area burned and black, cleared of vegetation, or comprised of dead plants.

Clearing understory vegetation is likely to improve the recreational resource in many cases due to increased visibility and access.

5.14.8 Bioregion-Specific Indirect Effects of Implementing the Program/Alternatives

As mentioned above, for crown fire vegetation types it is possible that VTP treatments could result in more than 80% of a project area burned and black, cleared of vegetation, or comprised of dead plants. Only the Sacramento Valley, San Joaquin, and South Coast Bioregions are dominated by crown fire regime vegetation types, within which more than 1% of the watersheds in the bioregion are likely to receive VTP treatments that cover 10% or more of a watershed area each year (Table 5.0.7). Thus, recreation is more likely to be indirectly affected in these three bioregions due to decreased visual quality, compared to the other bioregions (Determination Criteria 2).

However, there is low likelihood that more than 10% of a given recreational area (state park, conservancy, etc.) would be treated in a single year, unless the recreational area was very small. Many recreational areas (state parks, conservancies, etc.) encompass parts of multiple watersheds and it is unlikely that all watersheds within a given recreation area would be intensively treated (>10% area) in a single year, thus less than 10% of most recreational areas would be simultaneously treated.

5.14.9 Determination of Significance

It is unlikely that the Proposed Program would either:

- 1) Close more than 1% of state park lands, or other public recreational areas, because of VTP treatments during the peak visitor season over a calendar year, or;
- 2) Severely reduce visual quality (more than 80% burned and black, cleared of vegetation, or comprised of dead plants) on more than 10% of the area of any one state park, or other public recreational area, during the peak visitor season over a calendar year.

Therefore impacts to recreational resources from the Proposed Program are not likely to be significantly adverse. The Alternatives treat the same acreage or less as the Proposed Program and are also not likely to cause significant adverse effects to the recreational resource.

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5.14.10 Similar Effects Described Elsewhere

Impacts to visual/aesthetic resources are described in Section 5.13.

5.14.11 Mitigation Measures for the Proposed Project

Checklist Question- applies primarily to small recreational areas (<3,000 acres).

Checklist Item 5.14.1. Will the proposed project result in more than 1% of the recreational area being closed to recreational use or more than 10% of the recreational area in a condition of decreased visual quality?