



Benicia Fire Department Vegetation Management Program FAQs

What is the Goal of the Vegetation Management Program?

The goal of the Vegetation Management Program is to control plant material to prevent the spread of wildfire by changing the characteristics of the vegetation in open spaces surrounding homes and other structures.

What are the risks of vegetation fires?

Vegetation fires originating in the open space risk transitioning onto residential property, including fences, decks, patios, roofs, and homes. No realistic vegetation management program will completely alleviate all risks. Where there is dry vegetation and people, there will be fires. By strategically reducing areas of vegetation, these inevitable fires will slow in their rate of travel and intensity. This will give firefighting crews a better chance at keeping the fires in the open spaces and out of residential structures.

How much open space is impacted by vegetation management?

The City of Benicia is responsible for the management of 1793 acres of open space and City lots.

What approaches does the City use?

The City of Benicia utilizes multiple approaches in its Vegetation Management Program, including goats, discing, and spraying.

What methods have we used in recent years?

Historically, the Fire Department contracted with heavy equipment discing companies each spring to disrupt the vegetation around the perimeter of each open space. This created limited fire breaks, designed to slow the spread of fire in order to give firefighters time to respond and extinguish fires before they impact developed properties. In 2021, the Department transitioned to an agreement with Goats R Us, who utilizes herds of goats to perform this task. Goats are incredibly effective at reducing the amount of vegetation and are able to easily navigate the steep terrain. In 2022, the intention was to graze all open spaces with goats again. However, the goats were behind schedule. To speed things up, Fire Dept. staff brought in the discing tractor to help the goats quickly create fire breaks before fire season.

How does the Fire Dept. decide what to do for vegetation management?

In 2023, the City Council formally adopted the new [City of Benicia Vegetative Fuels](#)

[Management Plan](#). The Plan provides information and decision making tools for the Fire Department to reduce wildfire risk in the City's open spaces using a site-specific approach while making efficient usage of available financial and administrative resources.

Are the goats visiting the open space behind my property?

In 2023, vegetation in the open spaces is being managed by both a discing tractor company and goat grazing. Click on the maps below to see which method will be used to manage the vegetation behind your house by June 30, 2023.

[Map of goat grazing areas](#)

[Map of discing tractor areas](#)

Were the goats utilized before 2021?

In the early 2000s, the Benicia Fire Department began allowing goats to graze in our open spaces during the off season. The owners did not charge a fee for this and it was a mutually beneficial agreement that allowed our vegetation to be reduced and provided the livestock owners a location to keep their goats when not in use by other municipalities for paid grazing work. Also, our residents have generally embraced the goats and they have become a loved piece of the community. The problem with that arrangement was that the Department had no control over how many goats would be in the City, where the goats would graze, or when they would come and go.

Can I request the goats be moved to the open space behind my residence?

No, the scope of work for the 2023 season is already determined based on direction from the City of Benicia Vegetative Fuels Management Plan.

What City Ordinance governs the Vegetation Management Program?

Vegetation Management is regulated by [Benicia Municipal Code](#), Chapter 8.08.

Additional guidance in accomplishing compliance is provided by the Fire Department's [Standard G-701, Maintenance Standard for Vegetation Management](#).

The Standard calls for:

1. Discing and mowing of parcels to maintain growth of weeds to less than 4 inches.
2. Alternative methods for reducing the hazard on larger open parcels without having to mow these parcels. These alternatives call for the creation of 30-foot breaks around combustible structures and the perimeter of these larger parcels.
3. The reduction of weed/grass growth between disc lines and combustible structures.

In addition, General Plan Policy 4.15.1 states:

Promote the creation and maintenance of natural and artificially constructed firebreaks between development and open space areas through the use of fire resistive landscaping, weed abatement, discing and other methods.

When will vegetation management be completed for the 2023 season?

Both discing tractor and goat herding work will begin in mid-Spring and will be completed no later than June 30th (weather permitting). Please note that neither goat herding nor discing tractor work is intended to completely clear vegetation, but rather reduce it to slow the spread of fire.

How can I protect my property from vegetation fires?

- Clear leaves and other debris from gutters, eaves, porches and decks.
- Remove dead vegetation and other items from under decks, porches, and within 10 feet of the house.
- Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent debris and combustible materials from accumulating.
- Remove flammable materials (firewood stacks, propane tanks, etc...) within 30 feet of your home's foundation and outbuildings, including garages and sheds.
- Wildfire can spread to tree tops. Prune trees so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet from the ground.
- Keep your lawn hydrated and maintained. If it is brown, cut it down to reduce fire intensity. Dry grass and shrubs are fuel for wildfire.
- Don't let debris and lawn cuttings linger. Dispose of these items quickly to reduce fuel for fire.
- Inspect shingles or roof tiles. Replace or repair those that are loose or missing to prevent ember penetration.
- Cover exterior attic vents with metal wire mesh no larger than 1/8 inch to prevent embers from entering the home.
- Enclose under-eave and soffit vents or screens with metal mesh to prevent ember entry.
- Learn more about how to protect your home and property at www.firewise.org.

Why are there more coyotes visible? Is the City's Vegetation Management Program having an effect on the coyote population?

No. Though concerns have been raised regarding vegetation management efforts causing an increase in coyotes, vegetation management is not something new. The proliferation of coyotes is an issue throughout the Bay Area and beyond. As noted in the [Humane Society's "Coyote Management and Coexistence Plan"](#) (posted on the Police Department page of the City's website):

Due to their intelligence and adaptability, in addition to extensive urbanization and the subsequent decline of larger predators, coyotes have successfully expanded their range across North America. Coyotes are now found in all states in the U.S. except Hawaii and have become well established in nearly every ecosystem. They live in deserts, swamps, tundra and grasslands, brush, dense forests, cities and suburbs. People can live among coyotes yet never see them. Often, it's only an evening chorus or group howling and yipping that alerts us to the presence of this wild canid in our neighborhoods. It is important to keep in mind that coyotes have been interacting with and adapting to

people for at least the last 100 years. The increase in visibility of coyotes does not appear to be a result of the City's vegetation management efforts, but rather a more global issue. Many communities are looking at how to best coexist with this wildlife.

What are the alternatives to existing practices?

- 1. Chemical:** Spraying an herbicide to control vegetation is an effective method but is not likely something we would consider for overall vegetation management. Its use on a limited basis may be considered for a specific application, such as the emergency vehicle access areas to prevent continual regrowth. The use of such materials should be in compliance with the City's policies and procedures.
- 2. Hand Clearing:** The use of manual labor to remove brush with an assortment of tools including the Pulaski, hand axe, grubbing hoe, chain saw, handsaw and others to modify the vegetation arrangement. Hand clearing is the most common method used by property owners to meet fire code requirements, but it requires large crews and would take a significant amount of time each season.
- 3. Prescribed Fire:** The confined application of fire to a preselected area of land in order to minimize the amount of fuel in the area. Prescribed fires are carried out only under specific weather and fuel conditions and are used to mimic nature's own process of regeneration. This practice can be very effective but is not without risk. Additionally, it requires a great deal of personnel and staff time. Finally, it often creates a great deal of anxiety in the community.

Who do I contact if I have questions about Vegetation Management?

Contact the Benicia Fire Department at:

firedept@ci.benicia.ca.us or 707-746-4275