Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve Vegetation Management Plan
Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a Mount Sutro Open Space Reserve Vegetation Management Plan? California’s multi-year drought and other factors have caused significant decline in tree health, threatening both public safety and the long-term sustainability of the Reserve. Independent experts have surveyed the forest and say there is abundant evidence to indicate that the existing forest will continue to decline due to tree overcrowding, climate change, and insects and diseases now present in the Reserve. The only path to healthy, diverse vegetation involves active management and reforestation.

Will UCSF preserve Mount Sutro or does UCSF want to develop the land? UCSF is committed to maintaining the Reserve as a public resource that San Francisco residents and visitors can enjoy. In 1976, the Regents of the University of California designated the Reserve as permanent open space, and UCSF has dedicated significant resources to ensuring the health, safety and accessibility of the Reserve. UCSF cannot develop the land because the open space designation prevents the construction of any new buildings in the Reserve.

Will Mount Sutro still feel like an urban forest? One of the goals of the management plan is to restore the tree canopy and preserve the “forest-like” feel of the Reserve. In areas that have become deforested by dead or dying trees, the plan calls for tree replanting. To enhance biodiversity, UCSF has also designated five acres, spread out in small pockets throughout the Reserve, for native plant species regeneration, which totals approximately 8% of the land area of the Reserve.

How many trees will be affected by the management plan? An independent survey of the forest determined that out of the approximately 14,000 trees in the Reserve, around 3,500 are standing dead and many more are dying. The exact number of trees to be removed is unknown because the trees to be removed will be determined by tree health and viability in targeted areas over the course of the 20-year plan. The priority will be to remove dead and dying trees near trails, roads, structures...
and neighboring homes that pose a hazard. As part of the replanting effort, dead and
dying trees will be removed in targeted areas to make way for young and vigorous trees
to begin to regenerate the tree canopy.

**Will you prioritize native species over the non-native species in the Reserve?**
Eucalyptus trees are part of the cultural heritage of Mount Sutro. The plan seeks to
achieve a balance between preserving the eucalyptus canopy, which is non-native, and
also increasing the number of native plants and trees to improve the health of the
Reserve by increasing biodiversity.

**Will herbicides be used to maintain the Reserve?**
No herbicides are used in the Reserve. All maintenance work is performed by hand and
mechanical tools by UCSF staff and volunteers or goats to control vegetation growth.

**Why doesn’t UCSF just leave it alone?**
Mount Sutro is a popular urban forest, and the large number of dead and dying trees
poses a safety hazard. UCSF’s top priority in the Reserve is to ensure the safety of Reserve
users and adjoining campus and neighboring properties, which requires vegetation
management. If the forest is not managed, a greater loss of trees will occur over time as
the current rate of tree death continues or even increases. As trees die, there will be a
subsequent increase in fire hazard, among other negative effects.

**Are you planning to clear cut trees?**
No, the trees will not be clear-cut, which means all trees in a stand are removed. We will
remove unhealthy trees. Hazardous trees are marked individually based on tree health and
whether tree failure would impact trails, roads or structures. In areas in which most of the
trees are dead or dying, established forestry methods would be used to remove select
trees to create openings of .25 acres or less for tree replanting to regenerate the tree
canopy.

**Will removing trees and underbrush cause landslides?**
Both the management plan and the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) address
landslide risks. The DEIR was written with the input of qualified geologists and hydrologists
who recommended strategies to mitigate erosion and landslide risk, which are part of standard forestry practice. Ways to reduce landslide potential include stabilizing soils using natural materials; avoiding work in historically unstable soil when its wet; and using structures and materials such as culverts, logs, rocks and vegetation to stabilize soils and minimize erosion. If trees are removed on steep slopes, various methods can be used to stabilize the slopes prior to and after removal until new vegetation has set roots. These methods are included in the vegetation management plan.

**Will removing trees and underbrush dry out the forest and create more fire danger?**
No, removing dead trees and “ladder fuels” from parts of the Reserve will not make it more fire-prone or dry out the forest. Certain small trees and shrubs act as a ladder to move a fire up into the canopy of the forest, increasing fire risk. Removal of these ladder fuels reduces the amount of material that could fuel a fire.

**What impact will the implementation have on neighbors?**
UCSF avoids tree work during bird-nesting season, which means that plan implementation will occur during the months of September through February, and UCSF will notify neighbors in advance of work taking place near their homes. Our “good neighbor” policy limits noisy work near neighboring homes to 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. Weekend work in the Reserve is rare, but if necessary, noisy work hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
**Group Selection:** Eight small openings, totaling 2.5 acres, will be created by removing dead, dying and unhealthy trees to promote the growth of remaining trees, reduce number of dead trees, provide space for new regeneration, reduce risk of tree failure and reduce fuel loads.

**Seed Tree:** Two small openings, totaling 1.5 acres, will be created by removing dead, dying and unhealthy trees. Healthy trees will be retained to restock the forest.