



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT Vegetation Management Program

The Vegetation Management Program (VMP) allows public and private landowners to participate in wildland fuel reduction projects in partnership with CAL FIRE. The primary tool used is prescribed fire, although in more recent years CAL FIRE has used the program for mechanical treatments of vegetation as well.

Vegetation management, or VMP, was preceded by the Range Improvement Program that was used aggressively by CAL FIRE to remove undesired woody vegetation and increase for agricultural production for domestic stock and wildlife. Early records indicate that range improvement burns were conducted by CAL FIRE as early as 1945, when CAL FIRE was known as the Division of Forestry under the Department of Natural Resources. Acres burned during the period of 1949-1953 averaged 141,400 acres per year and totaled approximately 707,000 acres for the same period (T. F. Arvola Deputy State Forester, Inter Office Memo, April 5, 1954). These burns were carried out in cooperation with landowners primarily interested in improving forage for livestock.



In July of 1980 Senate Bill 1704 (Keene) created the Chaparral Management Program. This legislation provided CAL FIRE authorization to contract with private and public landowners for the purpose of fuel hazard reduction, vegetation management, and the improvement of wildlife, range, and forest resources. The program is currently known as the Vegetation Management Program. However, the objectives and authority for fuel reduction projects are still guided by the statutes created by Senate Bill 1704, and more recently Senate Bill 1260, which removed the cost share requirement for landowners. The program outcomes reduce catastrophic wildfires, protect communities, and create a fire adaptive California.

VMP acres treated declined significantly for a few years, due to increasing rural populations and air quality issues. However, new CAL FIRE programs have increased the use of prescribed fire in many areas of the state. VMP is a cost-effective tool that is still used to treat vegetation where physical and social conditions are conducive to its use. The program has proven to be well suited for controlling invasive weeds and improving wildlife habitat under joint projects with organizations such as the Nature Conservancy.

To help increase the pace and scale of forest treatments on private property, SB 1260 (2018) waives the VMP cost-share requirements for landowners, allows for private burn bosses to conduct burns on private property, and expands the ability of CAL FIRE to work with Prescribed Burn Associations.



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