

## 4.7 FIRE PROTECTION

This section describes existing fire hazards near the proposed project area and potential impacts associated with those fire hazards relative to existing and proposed structures. Potential impacts related to emergency access are discussed in Section 4.10 *Transportation and Circulation*.

### 4.7.1 Setting

**a. Project Area Setting.** The Zone 2 Landslide Moratorium Ordinance Revisions project area is located on the hills above the south-central coastline of the City, is within the City's larger (approximately 1,200-acre) Landslide Moratorium Area (LMA). Of the 111 lots within Zone 2, 64 are developed with residences and accessory structures, and 47 are undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels. Lots within Zone 2 are generally  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre to one or more acres in size. Developed lots contain mainly one-story single-family homes and many also contain accessory structures including equestrian facilities. Vacant lots within the project area are characterized by highly variable topography and are vegetated with scrub, grasses, mature trees and, in some cases, accessory structures and equestrian facilities. The project area is encompassed by vegetated open space to the north, east, and west which makes up the Portuguese Bend and Upper Filiorum Natural Communities Conservation Planning (NCCP) subareas of the Rancho Palos Verdes Nature Preserve, and has limited existing residential uses to the south.

**b. Fire Hazards.** The majority of the Zone 2 project area consists of developed and undeveloped parcels on variably sloping land vegetated with grasses and trees. The County of Los Angeles Fire Department has designated the site as a very high fire hazard area (Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map, 2007). The County's fire hazard map was developed by the Forestry Division based on an evaluation of fuels, topography, dwelling density, weather, infrastructure, building materials, brush clearance, and fire history, and serves to determine increased insurance rates and building requirements. Weather is the single most important component affecting wildfire. In particular, specific weather events can occur that drastically alter the normally temperate Rancho Palos Verdes coastal plain climate to create catastrophic wildfire conditions. The winds that create extreme wildfire conditions in the Southern California region are known as the "Santa Ana" winds.

**c. Fire Protection.** The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACFD) Battalion 14 provides fire prevention, fire suppression, and life safety services to the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. LACFD Battalion 14 has 8 fire stations throughout Rancho Palos Verdes and surrounding area, staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The nearest fire station (#53) is located at 6124 Palos Verdes Drive South, approximately one-half mile northwest of the Portuguese Bend community access point at Narcissa Drive. Station #53 is staffed by one captain, one engineer, and one firefighter. Station #53 equipment includes one pumper fire truck (Captain Demeyer, Personal Communication, April 26, 2011). Access to Portuguese Bend is provided solely from Palos Verdes Drive South, which connects to the private community via Narcissa Drive and Peppertree Drive from the south. In case of an emergency, the fire station uses a remote control or key to open the locked gates at both private community entrances.

**d. Regulatory Setting.** The City of Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan and Municipal Zoning Code include a number of goals, policies and regulations intended to maintain and



augment fire protection within the City. Selected policies and regulations that are applicable to the project's potential fire hazard impacts are discussed below.

General Plan. The Safety Element of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes General Plan (1975) generally describes the wildfire hazard history, potential, risk factors, and emergency services in the City and sets forth policies and recommendations by which to increase safety and reduce hazards. The following selected policies related to safety and fire protection may be considered applicable to the project area.

- Policy 2.** Adopt and enforce building codes, ordinances, and regulations using best practices which contain design and construction standards based upon appropriate levels of risk and hazard.*
- Policy 4.** Cooperate with the fire protection agency and water company to ensure adequate water flow capabilities throughout all areas of the City.*
- Policy 6.** Develop stringent site design and maintenance criteria for areas of high fire hazard potential.*
- Policy 9.** Ensure that services are provided to deal adequately with health and sanitation problems.*

Municipal Code. Rancho Palos Verdes Municipal Code Section 8.08.010 adopts the Los Angeles County Fire Code, Title 32, as the Fire Code of the City of Rancho Palos Verdes. The County maintains fire safety requirements, development standards and regulations, and standard fees, for new development. Building standards for fire hazards, including roof coverings, construction materials, structural components, and clearing of brush and vegetative growth, are administered by the LACFD and the City's Building and Safety Division.

For areas located within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ), County Fire Code Sections 325.2.1.2, 328.10, 1117.2.1 and 4908.1 require completion and approval of a land development plan and fuel modification plan. Appendices B and C of the Fire Code specify that for single-family dwellings located on a lot of one acre or more in a VHFHSZ, the fire-flow must be 1,000 gallons per minute for a duration of two hours and hydrants must be spaced not more than 600 feet apart. Additionally, the City's Building and Safety Division mandates wildfire protection building construction requirements intended to mitigate wildfire exposure in an urban interface area.

The LACFD Fuel Modification Unit provides guidelines the VHFHSZ in order to create a defensible space for effective fire protection in newly constructed and/or remodeled homes. Fuel modification zones in the project area are strategically placed strips of land where combustible native or ornamental vegetation has been modified or replaced with drought-tolerant, low-fuel-volume plants, creating a buffer to areas of natural vegetation surrounding the perimeter of a single-family dwelling. A fuel modification plan identifies specific zones within a property which are subject to fuel modification. Plans vary in complexity and fuel modification distances are estimated based on the fire history, the amount and type of vegetation, the arrangement of the fuels, topography, local weather patterns, and construction, design and placement of structures. The plan must also include an irrigation plan, a landscape plan, zone delineation for setbacks, irrigation, and thinning, and the identification of responsible parties for the plan's installation and maintenance.



Joint Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan. The 2004 City of Rancho Palos Verdes Joint Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan seeks to promote sound public policy designed to protect citizens, critical facilities, infrastructure, private property, and the environment from natural hazards, such as wildfires. The mitigation plan provides a list of activities that may assist the City in reducing risk and preventing loss from future natural hazard events. City mitigation measures applicable to the project area include:

- WF #3-1. Encourage development and dissemination of information relating to the fire hazard to help educate and assist builders & homeowners in being engaged in wildfire mitigation activities, and to help guide emergency services during response.*
- WF #3-2. Increase communication, coordination & collaboration between wildland/urban interface property owners, local planners and fire prevention crews & officials to address risks, existing mitigation measures, and federal assistance programs.*
- WF #3-3. Encourage implementation of wildfire mitigation activities in a manner consistent with the goals of promoting sustainable ecological management & community stability.*

#### **4.7.2 Impact Analysis**

##### **a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds.**

The County of Los Angeles does not include specific significance thresholds for impacts to fire hazards and fire protection services. Development within the project area must provide adequate emergency access, fire hydrants and fire flow in accordance with Los Angeles County Fire Code. In addition, a fuel modification plan providing adequate defensible space requires review and approval prior to issuance of a building permit. Significance criteria for this section have been taken from the Initial Study (Zone 2 Landslide Moratorium Ordinance Revisions, 2010) which is based on the *State CEQA Guidelines*. For the purpose of this analysis, a significant impact would occur if implementation of the proposed ordinance revisions would:

- *Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands*

Potential impacts related to emergency access are discussed in Section 4.10, *Transportation and Circulation*.

##### **b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.**

**Impact FIRE-1 The project area is located in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone and is adjacent to the Portuguese Bend and Upper Filiorum subareas of the Rancho Palos Verdes Nature Preserve on the north, east and west. New residences constructed as a result of adoption of the proposed ordinance**



**revisions could expose people or structures to risks associated with wildland fires. Impacts would be Class II, *significant but mitigable*.**

The project area is located adjacent to the Portuguese Bend and Upper Filiorum NCCP subareas, which are primarily vegetated with grasses, scrub, and mature trees. This vegetated open space abuts developed and undeveloped lots within Zone 2 to the north, east and west. As such, residences developed within the project area would be exposed to increased fire hazards risk. In addition, the introduction of additional structures and residences could increase the potential for fires due to human carelessness, appliance malfunctions, faulty wiring or cinders from fireplaces. Inadequate emergency access, fire hydrant spacing and fire flow rates could also pose significant fire hazard risks. However, each new residence must submit a land development plan and receive approval from the LACFD Land Development Unit, demonstrating compliance with the Los Angeles County Fire Code requirements on specified flow rates, fire hydrant spacing and emergency access within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

Prior to any development in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, property owners would also be required to submit a fuel modification plan to the LACFD Forestry Division. This fuel modification plan must be reviewed and approved for defensible space, reasonable fire safety, and compliance with Sections 325.2.1, 325.2.2, 325.10, and 503.2.1 of the Los Angeles County Fire Code, the Fire Departments Fuel Modification Guidelines, and California Code of Regulations Title 14, Division 1.5, Chapter 7, subchapter 2. While the risk of wildfire hazard in the project area would remain, with the required development and implementation of proper fuel modification plans, in addition to required adherence to all Los Angeles County building codes concerning fire safety, impacts would be less than significant but mitigable.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measures are intended to reduce impacts related to fire hazards to a less than significant level.

**FIRE-1 (a) Fuel-Load Vegetation Management.** Each applicant shall be required to prepare a fuel modification plan pursuant to the requirements of LACFD. The LACFD shall review and approve the plan prior issuance of a building or grading permit. The fuel modification plan shall at a minimum include the following:

- *Vegetation clearance requirements around all new structures within a minimum 100 foot buffer, or greater, as determined by LACFD;*
- *A landscaping plan using plants recommended for the Rancho Palos Verdes area and selected from the desirable plant list for setback, irrigated, or thinning zone; and*
- *A regularly scheduled brush clearance of vegetation on and adjacent to all applicable access roads, power lines, and structures.*

**FIRE-1(b) Fire Protection Requirements.** New, single-family residences and related accessory structures shall be designed to incorporate all fire protection requirements of the City's most recently adopted Building Code, to the satisfaction of the Building Official.



Significance After Mitigation. Upon implementation of mitigation measures FIRE-1(a) and FIRE-1(b), impacts related to fire hazards would be less than significant.

**c. Cumulative Impacts.** Cumulative projects in the Rancho Palos Verdes area, as listed in Table 3-1 in Section 3.0 *Environmental Setting*, would incrementally increase the potential for exposure to fire hazards depending on the precise location of such development. The proposed development would incrementally contribute to this cumulative effect. However, all new development would be subject to existing regulations relative to fire hazards. Impacts associated with individual developments would be addressed on a case-by-case basis as needed, in part by the application of development standards or mitigation measures for development in high fire hazards to reduce such risks if determined necessary. With implementation of the project-specific mitigation measures listed above the project's contribution to fire hazard impacts would not be cumulatively considerable. In addition, as discussed in Section 4.3, *Biological Resources*, it is possible that the development of some of the undeveloped lots in Zone 2 might result in impacts on existing or regrowth coastal sage scrub (CSS) habitat as a result of Fire Department-mandated fuel modification on- and/or off-site (i.e., in the Reserve) after construction of new residences is complete. However, with the inclusion of the mitigation measures identified in Section 4.3, impacts would be less than significant. Mitigation Measure BIO-2 would be required to reduce impacts to possible stands of CSS vegetation to a less than significant level. As further discussed in Section 4.3, *Biological Resources*, with implementation of mitigation measures (including Mitigation Measure BIO-2) the impacts of the proposed project would be localized in nature and would not substantially contribute to any cumulative impacts to regional biological resources.



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