

Portola Heights Fuel Reduction, 2015

**March 28, 2015
Final Report of the
California Proposition 40 Funded Project**

Vegetation Management in the Five Points Vicinity (5Points)
within the
Pescadero Creek Watershed
conducted by
California Conservation Corps, Monterey Bay Center
Sponsored by
Portola Park Heights Property Owners Association (PPHPOA)
South Skyline Fire Safe Council (SSFSC)

This is the final report of the manage vegetation in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) zone in the San Mateo County lands centered on the Five Points Vicinity within the Pescadero Creek watershed. The work consisted of cutting back the overgrowth of vegetation along fire roads, public and private access roads in the vicinity. The work covers the primary and emergency ingress and egress for the Portola Heights neighborhood off of 22400 Skyline Blvd (California Route 35) in La Honda.

The project entailed 2152 hours by the Monterey Bay Center of the California Conservation Corps clearing a “shaded fuel break” along routes used by over 30 families in the community covering 3.75 miles (up to 50 foot width) totaling 18ac of brush clearing. Any fires in the area would threaten the WUI and the various creeks that are part of the watershed. The headwaters of Peters Creek, Slate Creek and Bear Creek all begin within the Five Points Vicinity of Portola Heights.

The project was deemed a complete success by members of the community.

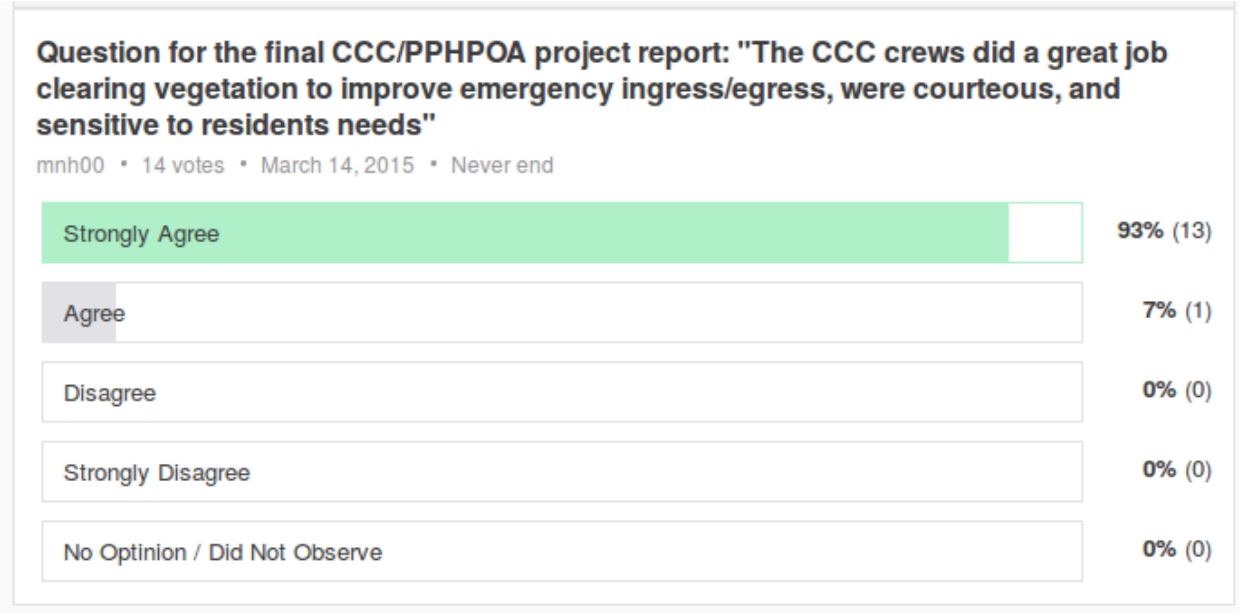


Fig 1. Anonymous poll results Portola Heights residents affected by the 5 Points project.

An accomplished goal of this project was to open up a second exit through Midpenninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD) lands in the event of an emergency. The route of 5 Points Road to School Rd to Ward Rd to Skyline Blvd now provides a southern emergency access route for CalFIRE and San Mateo County Fire vehicles and personnel to contain or control fires that might occur within the area.

The project was initiated by the Portola Park Heights Property Owners Association in their May, 2014 meeting. The original project proposal was completed August 11, 2014 and submitted for review by CCC personnel. The project was accepted August 28th.through the California Proposition 40 funds under Project Number B15-2325 resulting in a grant of 2152 hours. It was determined that a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Notice of Exemption (NOE) was required for the project. The CEQA NOE was signed by MROSD, a state agency, and filed with the San Mateo County Records Office on September 30th, 2014. The mandatory 35-day waiting period for the CEQA NOE expired November 5th, 2014 without comment. CCC requested additional forester's and archaeologist's reports that were exchanged between MROSD and CCC from December 2014 through January 2015. The project was planned to start on February 2nd, 2015 and commenced on time. The project completed March 5th, 2015.

Project Status as of March 5 th , 2015			
Road	Section	Status	Dates
Portola Heights Rd	From Peters Creek (0.72mi)	Completed	Feb. 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11(½)

Long Ridge Rd	From Doherty Ridge Rd to Cut-Across Rd (0.55mi)	Completed	Feb. 11(½), 12, 18
Cut-Across Rd	All (0.75mi)	Completed	Feb. 19, 23*, 24*
Sorich Rd	All (1.1mi)	Completed	Feb. 25*, 26*, Mar. 3+#, 4+
5 Points Rd	All (1.1mi)	Completed	Mar. 2, 3, 4, 5
Doherty Ridge Rd	From Long Ridge Rd to POST (0.2mi)	Completed	Mar. 4#, 5+#,

Table 1. Project Status as of Mar. 5th, 2015. CCC Crew Chief Dylan (all dates). * denotes second crew, CCC Crew Chief Anthony; + denotes third crew, CCC Crew Chief Caesar; # denotes fourth crew, CCC Crew Chief Marcus.

The original proposal (August, 2014) included fire roads of School Rd and Ward Rd (1.1mi). MROSD used their own crews to create a shaded fuel break of these roads later in the summer. As such, Sorich Rd (1.1mi) were substituted for these roads and inspection by CCC personnel confirmed this was part of the same WUI area approved as part of the project.

Approximately half the residents live on Doherty Ridge Rd area and half on the Long Ridge Rd area (see map, Fig 2.). After completion of this project three specific evacuation scenarios exist for residents. The first covers a wildland fire in Bear Creek area of the community, the second a fire in the Peters Creek area.

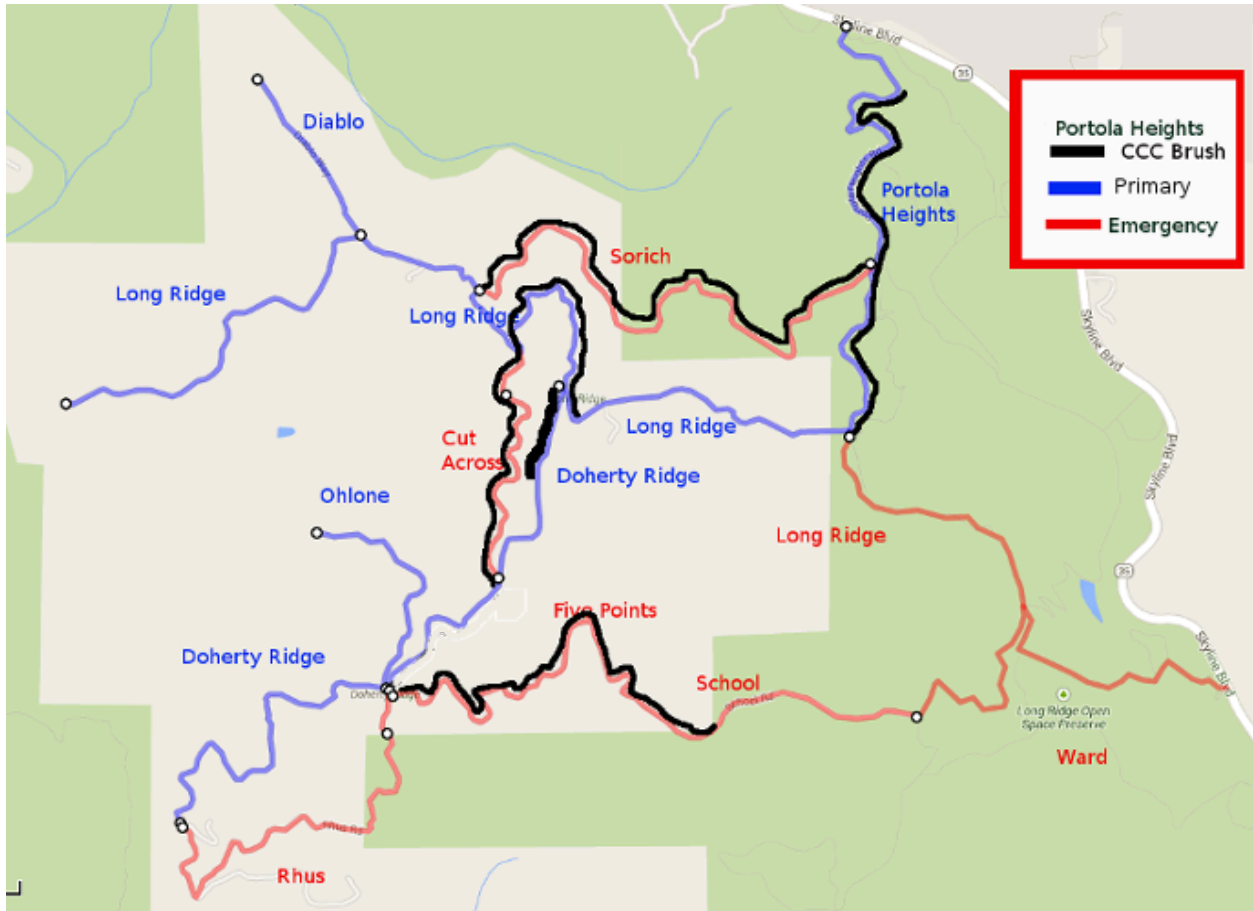


Fig. 2. 5 Points Vegetation Management Project (black: part of project; blue: residences; red: fire emergency ingress/egress). Note: MROSD completed School Rd and Ward Rd in Summer 2014.

and Doherty Ridge. Residents can evacuate and emergency vehicles can enter through Portola Heights Rd and travel along Long Ridge and Doherty Ridge roads. This was the only route open before the project but Portola Heights Rd has now been widened through the work of CCC. The second emergency scenario involves a wildland fire in the Peters Creek vicinity that may extend up the Devils Canyon toward Portola Heights Rd. Now, thanks to this project, Long Ridge Rd and Diablo Way residents can traverse the cleared Cut-Across Rd biway to Doherty Ridge, Five Points, School and Ward Rds out to Skyline. The third emergency scenario covered by this project involves a wildland fire in the Slate Creek area. Such a fire might block the Five Points Rd exit and potentially upper Long Ridge Rd as it connects to Portola Heights Rd. Thus, Doherty Ridge Rd. residents can evacuate across the now-cleared Cut-Across Rd. biway and join other residents evacuating through Sorich Rd. and Portola Heights Rd.

The Five Points Vegetation Management Project came in on time and under budget. See Table 2.

**5 Points Vegetation Management Project between CCC and PPHPOA
Project Costs – Draft 2015-03-20**

Item	Budgeted	Actual
Income		
CCC Hours Granted	2152	2152
Approximate \$\$	\$21,520	\$21,520
PPHOA resident contributions	\$3,700	\$3,700
Total Approximate Value	\$25,220	\$25,220
Costs		
CCC Hours Used	2152	2152
Approximate \$\$	\$21,520	\$21,520
PPHPOA volunteer hours	560	560
Chipping (SSFSC, Huerta Tree Service)	\$1,650	\$1,650
Portable toilets (Legacy)	\$1,000	\$0
Chainsaw and pole saw for CCC crews*	\$0	\$1,488
Tractoring (Guenther & Son)	\$250	\$250
Safety Equipment (Haynie)	\$100	\$100
Event Planning (Haynie)	\$150	\$150
CEQA NOE Filing Fee to SM Co. (Haynie)	\$52	\$52
Total Costs	\$24,722	\$25,210
Excess contributed back to PPHPOA Road Assoc	\$498	\$10

* - assets remain with PPHPOA for use by residents in the monthly road crew
 \$\$ - approximate value of granted hours at min. wage; does not the true cost of the grant in terms of Prop 40 funds allocated to CCC

Table 2. Five Points Vegetation Management Project Budget

Community monetary contribution for this project totaled \$3700. Funds were used during the coordination of the project and for support services. When it became apparent that CCC equipment breakdown during the project threatened the ability to complete it on time, the community purchased a Stihl pole saw and Huskvarna chain saw for use by the crew. A second pole saw was loaned from the SSFSC to the CCC crews. The equipment was the same model numbers already in use by the crew. The equipment remains with PPHPOA for future shaded fuel break maintenance during regularly scheduled “road crew” work.

“Thank you for the hard work setting up the shaded fuel break.”
 Ann, Portola Heights Resident.

Contributing significantly to the success of the project were the volunteers of Portola Heights. Over a dozen people were part of the effort to provide traffic control, taping off sensitive plants along the routes, chainsaw sharpening, coordination and supervision throughout the project. On

a typical day two to four residents volunteered, totaling approximately 560 hours over the lifetime of the project.

The crews carried out a “shaded fuel break” along the project routes, which covered areas from 2500ft elevation to 1000ft elevation. The vegetation included Douglas fir, live oak, tan oak, buckeye trees and coyote brush with coastal redwood at lower elevations. About 20ft on either side of the road was cleared in such a way as to keep potential ground fires from jumping into the tree canopy. Trees less than 6” at chest height were removed and the remaining trees were “limbed up” to a height of 8 ft. The areas were dense enough that few areas required removal of underbrush. When sensitive trees or shrubs were part of the underbrush, they were left untouched and surrounding trees were “limbed up” to 10 or 12ft to allow for an 8ft clearance from the remaining brush. Brush in the sensitive creek beds were chipped and scattered. In other areas brush was lopped and scattered and cut up so that it was lower than 16” from the ground.

“I am sure our entire community will be more secure in this drought fire season knowing our exits are safer and more accessible for residents and first responders.”

Lesley, Portola Heights Resident

Monterey Bay CCC crews were led by crew chiefs Dylan, Anthony, Marcus and Caesar with Dylan's crew on site the entire 28 day project. Crew performance was rated exceptional by the residents, FireSafe Council board members, MROSD and CalFIRE representatives. CCC Conservation Supervisor for the Monterey Bay Center Janet Wohlgemuth guided the project from the start. Associate Environmental Planner for CCC Jed McLaughlin guided the CEQA filing process. Brian Malone headed up the efforts of the MROSD. SSFSC President Bill Guenther oversaw the entire project. Project Manager and SSFSC member Mark Haynie rounded out the management team.

“I wish there was a choice for extra strongly agree. Thanks for the useful and beautiful work.”

Lee, Portola Heights Resident

The project was documented with before/after pictures along the routes. The next section documents the project.

5 Points Rd



Fig. 3. Overgrowth of scrubs along 5 Points Rd (before)

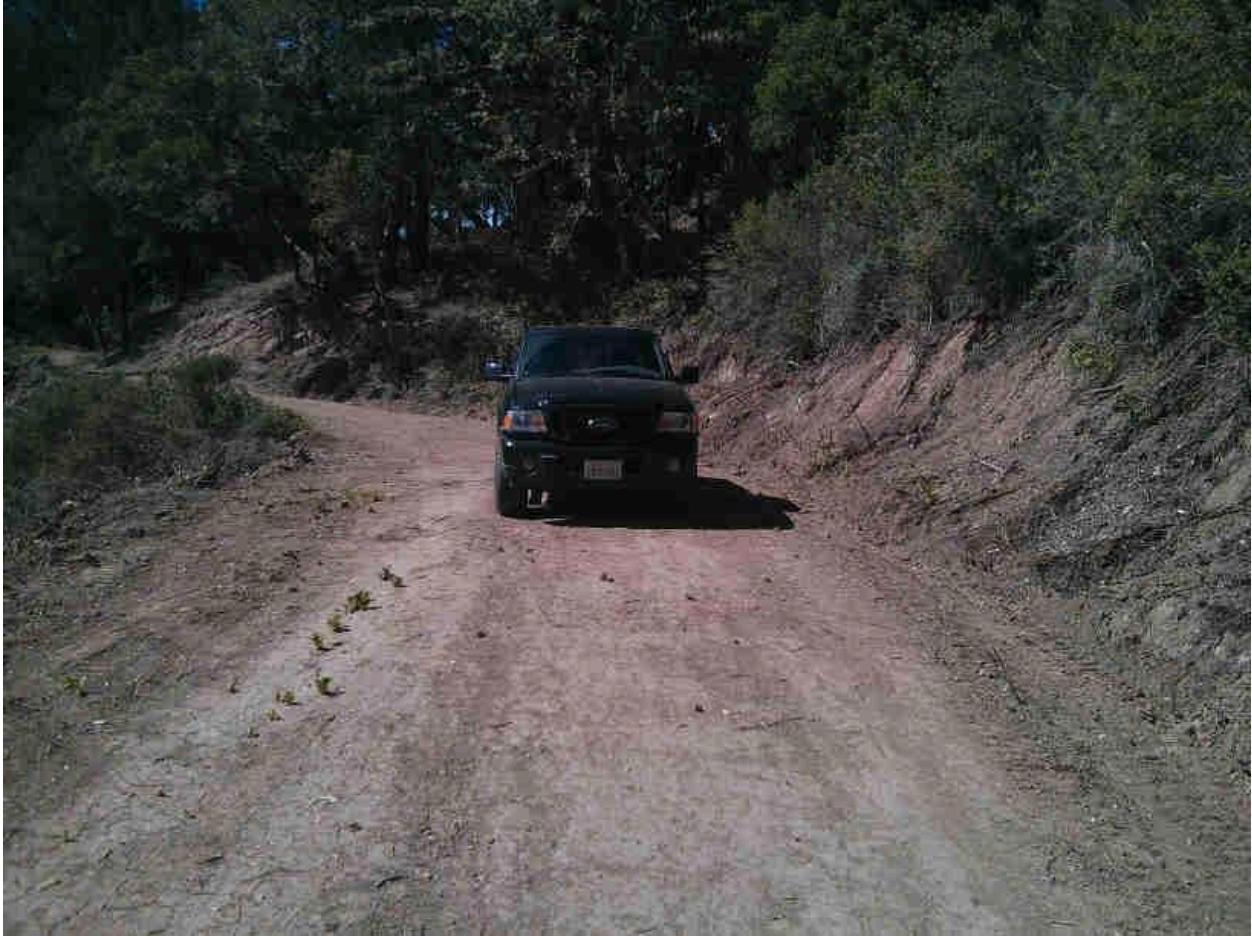


Fig. 4. Shaded fuel break completed along 5 Points Rd (after)

Portola Heights Rd



Fig. 5. CCC Crew working along Peters Creek along Portola Heights Rd (after)

Community Appreciation

The Portola Heights community held a “thank you” party for the three CCC crews working on the final day of the project.



Fig 6. CCC Crew members enjoying the “thank you” party.



Fig 7. CCC Crew with other residents of the community.

Next Steps

A “phase 2” of the Five Points Vegetation Management project is required to open up feeder roads to the emergency ingress and egress roads covered in this project. The follow-on project is described in a later proposal.

During February, 2015 a severe downpour occurred. Although none of the project roads were affected, School Rd (a continuation of the evacuation route connected to Five Points Rd) was severely damaged when a culvert overflowed on MROSD parcels. Because the goal of this project was to open a fire road through this route, School Rd must be repaired before the start of the fire season. PPHPOA will petition MROSD to make these repairs as soon as possible.



Fig. 8. School Rd culvert damaged suffered during February, 2015 rainstorm